

side



side

Jordan Casteel, *Untitled (portrait of her mother)*, 2010-11, oil on canvas









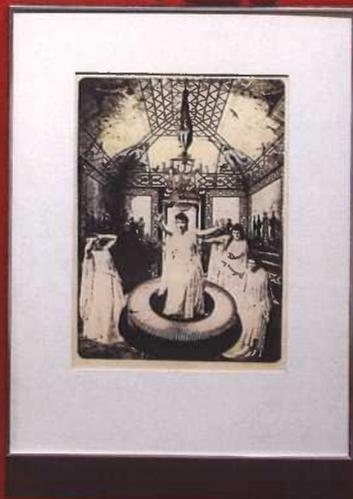
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A Curator's Notes

by Veronica Kessenich

In 1965, Harry L. Dalton gave 50 original works to Agnes Scott College in honor of his wife, Mary Keesler Dalton, class of 1925. Like many college galleries or University museums, Dalton's initial donation seeded decades of expansion through acquisitions of new work that include notable artists, both Atlanta-based and nationally renowned.

Ranging from the late 19th century to today, the collection is both disparate and notable for its strength, especially in the area of 20th and 21st century works on paper and photographs by historically important and notable artists such as Leonard Baskin, Thomas Hart Benton, Joseph Beuys, Lucinda Bunnell, Bethany Collins, Jenny Holzer, and Felix Gonzalez Torres. Bolstering the collection with new acquisitions by emerging, mid-career and established contemporary artists serves to re-contextualize and enliven the existing collection. *Side by Side: Selections from the Collection* highlights the value of institutional art collecting over time and, specifically, spotlights the integrity of the Agnes Scott collection.



“Dietrich” Sister Agnes Berchmans, *Jesus Calms the Storm (Mark 4:35-40)*, 1917, oil on canvas

We spent hours in the depths and crevices of the gallery storage spaces retrieving works and discovering treasures. For this exhibition, we focus on education, inclusion, and unconventional installation tactics. After two months of examining the archives, we selected a number of forgotten treasures to highlight within, among and alongside other more obvious choices within the array of current works.

In fact, *Side by side: Selections from the Permanent Collection* relies on a defining moment in the recent history of art when artist Fred Wilson challenged conventional viewing practices in *Mining the Museum*, a 1992 exhibition at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore. Wilson’s (re)design for viewing works in the museum’s collection created a disruptive narrative of museology. Through foregrounding current ideological





viewpoints alongside traditional expectations of museum display, Wilson was able to subvert and realign viewer (and curator) experience. Wilson, an African American artist, juxtaposed slave shackles and tea sets of the same time period within the same vitrine—creating radically different questions about work and life through contrasting objects. Wilson changed the narrative. Instead of keeping fine china in the parlor and shackles in the quarters, he mixed the two, creating an inherent—and troubling—dissonance. In *Mining the Museum*, the viewer comes face to face with the difficult truths of history. Fred Wilson's creative approach to exhibition design has prompted new interpretations in the larger context of curatorial practices.

◀ Angela West, *Nature Morte: Still Life #11*, undated, color photograph c print
Max Schnitzler, *The Bouquet*, 1941, oil on canvas

Entering the Dalton Gallery, an empty ornate frame displays the exhibition's title and performs its theme: divergent juxtapositions. The central gallery is devoted to tradition. Pairing works such as Angela West's *Nature Morte: Still Life #11* (2004) with Max Schnitzler's *The Bouquet* (1941) or Catherine Opie's *Kara* (2013) with Annetta Johnson Saint Gaudens' *Portrait Bust of a Young Man* (undated), the gallery establishes a specific methodical approach to understanding the work using medium, subject matter, and time. This interpretative structure can be problematic because it relies on the subjective elements, such as taste, or objective factors, such as truth.

The east gallery, nicknamed the 'red room', presents a wide range of portraits installed in the salon tradition on three of the five walls. The remaining two walls, separated by the entry door, posit Jordan Casteel's *Untitled (portrait of her mother)* (2010-11) and text defining the word:

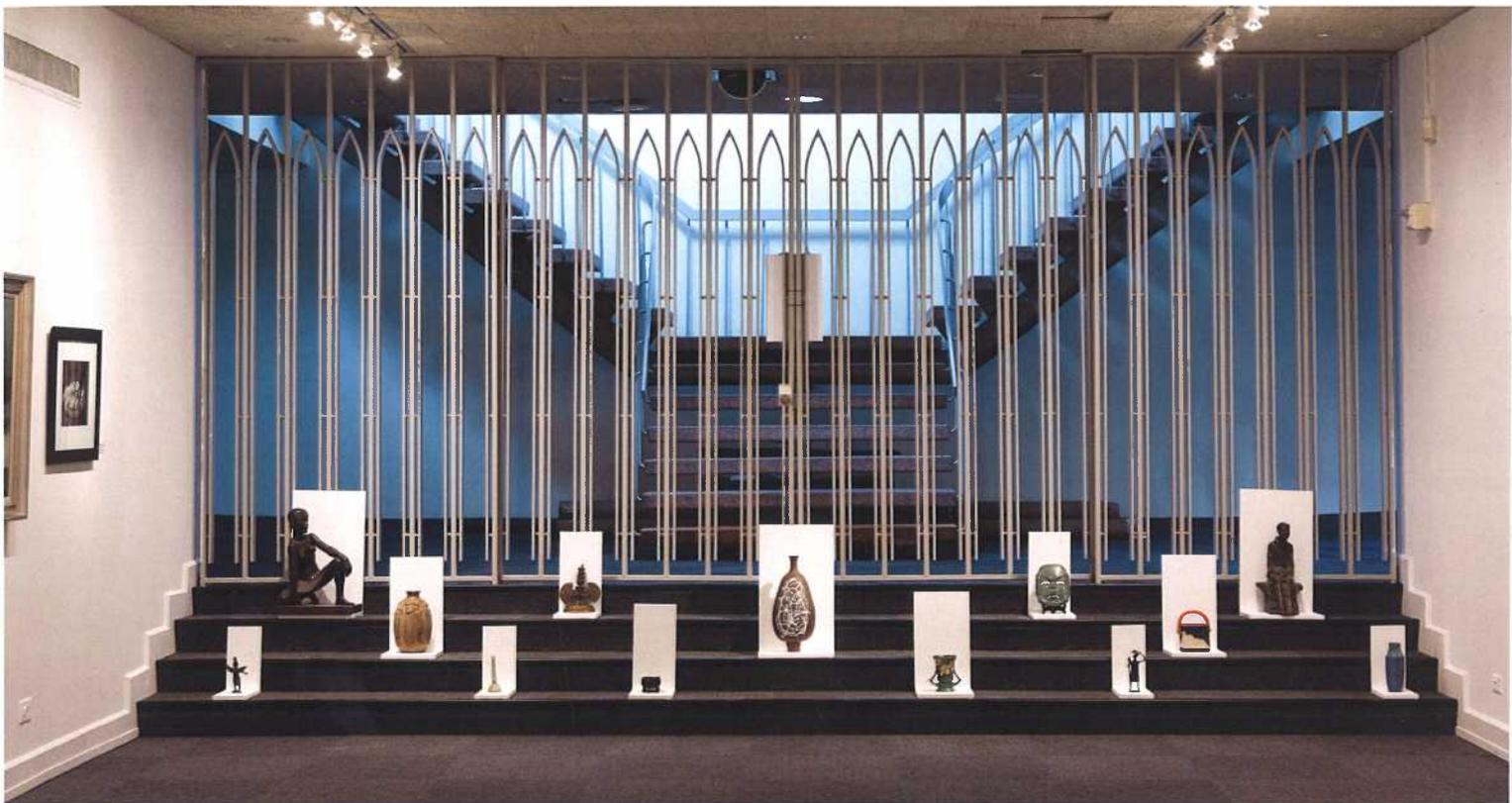
Salon:

a: a hall for the exhibition of art

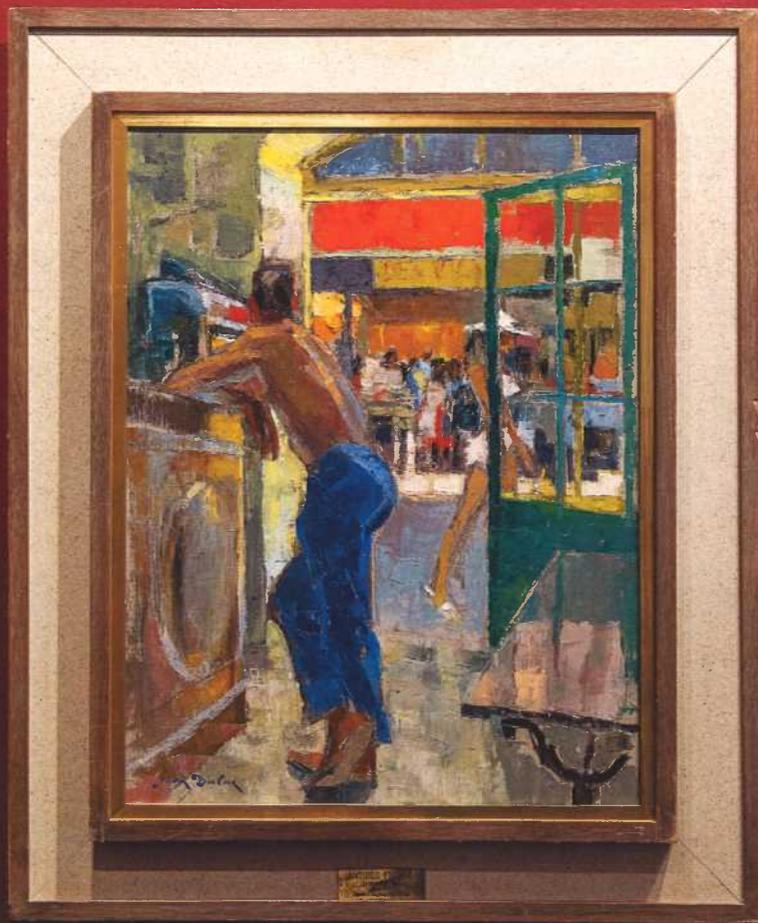
b: an annual exhibition of works of art

This gallery displays a wide-range of collected works and by hanging them in this style, no work is elevated above any other. The assemblage of works includes Rembrandt Peale's *Portrait of Mrs. McIlrath* (undated, late-19th century), Kara Walker's *Resurrection Story* (2017), Joel Peter Witkin's *Courbet in Rejlander's Pool* (1985), and Kojo Griffin's *Untitled (woman with rubbing alcohol, girl with skates)* (2004)—along with 26 others.

On the other side of the central gallery, two smaller rooms transition into a larger, enclosed space. Custom built consoles, placed on stage-like stairs, display sculptures of varying dimensions and materials. Hung side-by-side along the walls, works such



25



27

Jean Dulac, *Antibes, France-Le Bar du Pendu-Avenue Midasena*, undated, oil on canvas

as two unknown Roman photographs thematically contrast with “Dietrich” Sister Agnes Berchmans’ *Jesus Calms the Storm (Mark 4:35-40)* (1917). Or do they? A comparative analysis of the works may show that images of the Colosseum and Arch of Constantine, (seemingly mere Grand Tour photographs), presented next to a large-scale oil painting of Jesus may suggest a move in religious viewpoints from the monumental to the personal.

In two facing galleries, the first with a ceiling open to the upper floors, includes outstanding works by contemporary artists who confront notions of perception and history: Yasumasa Morimura, Jae Ko, Jiha Moon, and Sophia Wallace. Facing this gallery, in the room with a low ceiling, photographs and works on paper depict landscapes and demonstrate a stylistic evolution of what defines a beautiful scene.

Finally, in the back gallery, behind a wall of didactic text, hang paired artworks that connect to one another through form and content.

Presented together, the one hundred and two works included in this exhibition, wide-ranging in subject matter, medium, size and maker, reflect the evolution of the college itself. The collection has grown, changed and strengthened over the years, as has the diversity of Agnes Scott’s administrators, staff and students. Today, this exhibition lives as a testament to a particular moment in time—but tomorrow? As the college redefines its priorities and as disciplines meld and emerge, the next exhibition will undoubtedly emphasize these new attributes and new tastes.



Dialogues

by Anna Carnes '19

You will not leave this exhibition without participating in a conversation.

A conversation between works, among others, or within.

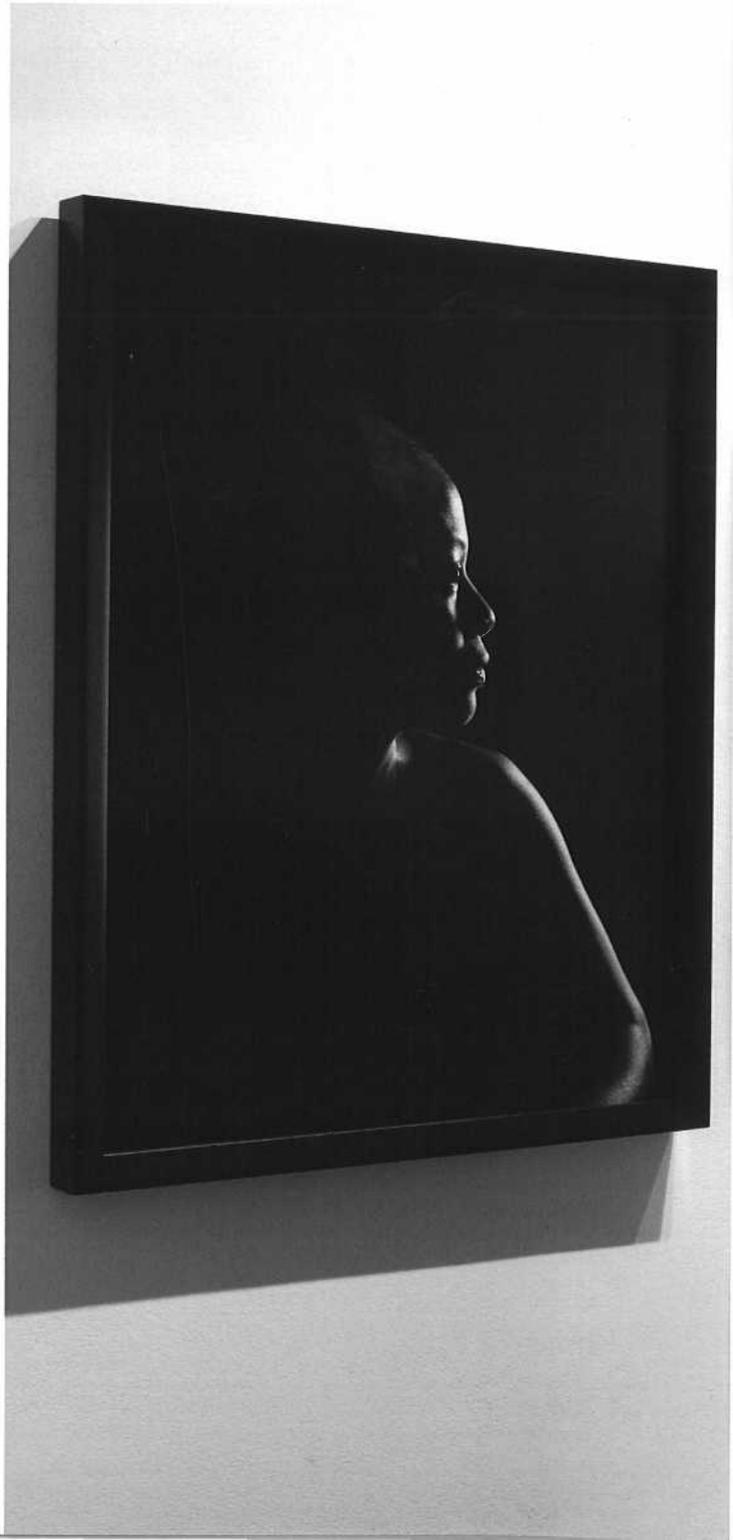
The Agnes Scott College permanent collection is a living, breathing thing. A living document of who we were, who we had hoped to be, who we are now, and who we hope to be yet. Reflected in the works of the Agnes Scott College Permanent Collection are the memories of those who have touched the collection. From the original donated works of the Daltons, acquisitions made under Gallery Directors, gifts from alumnae, Senior Select works acquired by generations of Agnes Scott Art Dept seniors—these works represent the past, present and future hopes of Agnes Scott College.

Spread out across campus our permanent collection is a series of great works of art, but together in this intimate space these works create infinite dialogues and meaning. Works that have only ever been connected under the umbrella of the permanent collection become acquainted before your eyes. Together Yasumasa Morimura's *Daughters of Art History (Little Princess A)* (2003) and Toyohara Kunichika's *Kabuki* (circa 1860) tell a story of the male as performer outside the constructs of gender—one from a tradition of Japanese culture and the other through the appropriation of art that crosses ethnic, gender, and racial boundaries. The works look at each other across a temporal gap of nearly 150 years but speak to each other at an intimate depth—*Kabuki* defines a cultural history for Morimura's work, and *Daughters of Art History (Little Princess A)* brings a contemporary exploration to Kunichika's 19th century woodblock print.

◀ Yasumasa Morimura, *Daughters of Art History (Little Princess A)*, 2003, chromogenic color print
Toyohara Kunichika, *Kabuki*, circa 1860, woodblock print

These dialogues are only limited by our ability to draw connections. Catherine Opie's *Kara* (2013, Photograph) and Annetta Johnson Saint Gaudens' *Portrait Bust of a Young Man* (undated, carrara marble) contrast portraiture from the early 20th century and from the present day. Both artists worked at carving out space to reveal the innermost essence of their subjects, but visually, the two works exist on the opposite ends of spectrums; in color, value, dimensionality, and subject matter. Yet these contrasts create a dialogue and a balance. They work beautifully apart—but in tandem—they make the viewer question why these works would ever be displayed apart.

Catherine Opie, *Kara*, 2013, photograph





These are just two of an incalculable number of connections to be made in this exhibition. I urge you to discover for yourself the encapsulated conversations that are waiting to be encountered across the gallery. Every work of art has the inherent potential for a powerful conversation, all that it requires is a willing participant to stand before it and ask “Why?”

Side by Side is a dialogue—and you’re a part of it.

Annetta Johnson Saint Gaudens, *Portrait Bust of a Young Man*, undated, carrara marble



Detail from Steffen Wolfgang Thomas, *Negro Mammy*, 1932, bronze cast with brown polished oxidized patina

T H A N K Y O U

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Painting: Ben Goldman

Photographs: Kasey Medlin

Printing: Jim and Tina Chueh, Sprint Print Decatur

A F T E R W O R D

Thank you to Nell Ruby for the invitation to mount this incredible exhibition. Special thanks to Anna Carnes for her inexhaustible support in the design, exhibition management, installation, and research of *Side by Side*. Special thanks to all of the artists included in this exhibition. It has been an honor working with your art.

Veronica Kessenich, 2019

Guest curator, executive director of Atlanta Contemporary, visiting instructor of art history at Agnes Scott College

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