

TREASURES of the IU Art Museum

Among Bloomington's many cultural touchstones, arguably the single greatest is the IU Art Museum. Home to more than 40,000 objects of rare quality from nearly every continent, it is widely considered to be one of the finest university art museums in the world. Presented here are a brief history of the museum and a sample of treasures from every area of its permanent collection.

by JEREMY SHERE

photography by

MICHAEL CAVANAGH and KEVIN MONTAGUE
Courtesy of Indiana University Art Museum



Stuart Davis
AMERICAN, 1892-1964
1938 • Oil on canvas

Swing Landscape

This large (14 feet by 7 feet) mural by American artist Stuart Davis is, for Jenny McComas, the IU Art Museum's Class of 1949 Curator of Western Art After 1800, one of the most visually exciting and aesthetically complex pieces in the museum's entire collection. "It's really amazing to see in person," she says. "The colors are so vibrant and the piece has such great rhythm and such an intricate composition that the effect is mesmerizing."

Originally commissioned by the Federal Art Project (part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Depression-era Works Progress Administration) to adorn the Williamsburg Housing Project in Brooklyn, New York, the painting was deemed too abstract and was never hung in the project—a blessing in disguise, as other murals exhibited there were

ultimately neglected and ruined.

The mural is also significant because it was the initial major acquisition (in 1942) made by Henry Hope, the museum's first director. The piece was controversial and not immediately accepted by the IU community as a great work of art; in fact, *Swing Landscape* was often used as a backdrop for student dances.

"It's a testament to Hope's eye for quality and to his desire to educate people about trends in modern art," McComas says. "Hope knew he had a real find and was determined to make it a centerpiece of the museum's collection." 42.1, Art © Estate of Stuart Davis/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY



Architect I. M. Pei incorporated triangles into his design for the IU Art Museum, which was completed in 1982.



Most everything we have really stands out. Even the more minor pieces are pretty spectacular,” says Judy Stubbs, the museum’s Pamela Buell Curator of Asian Art. “In many museums, some pieces have little presence—they just dissolve into the wall.”

“The Cultural Crossroads of Indiana”

The story of the IU Art Museum’s rise to prominence begins, as do many of the university’s more renowned attributes, with former president Herman B Wells. Inaugurated in 1938 as IU’s eleventh president, Wells early on developed a plan to make IU Bloomington “the cultural crossroads of Indiana,” with a world-class art museum at its core. One of his first moves, in 1941, was to hire Harvard-trained art

critic and historian Henry Radford Hope to chair the art department and to create a museum of great breadth and depth, including visual art objects from around the world and across time.

Despite their enthusiasm and energy, the plan stumbled out of the gate, curtailed by the advent of World War II. Redirecting his focus in late 1941, Hope embarked on an ambitious program to host a new exhibition of borrowed and traveling art works every month. The first, titled “Sixteen Brown County Painters,” inaugurated an exhibition schedule that over the next several decades would feature more than 400 shows.

In the postwar years, Hope made slow but steady progress, donating many works from his



Thomas Solley (left) and I. M. Pei during museum construction, 1981.

Dr. Wells begins the excavation at the Art Museum and Fine Arts Library Building ground-breaking ceremonies in the spring of 1978. President John W. Ryan looks on.

own collection and eliciting gifts of artwork from wealthy donors. By the early 1960s, when the university’s art holdings were moved from Mitchell Hall into the newly built Fine Arts Building, the collection had grown to more than 4,000 objects, with a particular emphasis on modern art and increasing strength in art from Africa, Asia, and the Americas.

“With his eye for fine pieces and unwavering dedication to seeing President Wells’ vision made real, Henry Hope laid the way,” says Adelheid Gealt, the museum’s current director and Curator of Western Art Before 1800.

Enter Thomas Solley

Nearing the end of his career, Hope hand-picked Yale-educated Thomas Solley as his successor. Under Solley, from 1971 until his retirement in 1986, the museum increased its holdings from 4,000 to 30,000 objects, evolving from a small teaching collection to one of the richest, deepest, and most diverse among American university museums.

By far Solley’s most notable accomplishment, however, was overseeing the planning and construction of the arrestingly modern museum building. Trained as an architect at Yale and having done graduate work in art history at IU, Solley was uniquely suited to the task. His boldest decision was to hire I. M. Pei, who by the early 1970s had established himself as a master of modern architecture.

Pei had previously designed the celebrated Everson Museum of Art building in Syracuse, New York, and had recently been commissioned to design the new East Building of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Working closely with Pei and his staff, Solley gave the famed architect freedom to explore his growing fascination with triangular forms while maintaining his own vision for large gallery spaces that would allow for flexible and creative installations.

Completed and officially dedicated in 1982, the new building marked a decisive moment in the museum’s development. “It was a turning point to suddenly be able to house the collection in a state-of-the-art space dedicated to showing objects the way they were meant to be seen,” Gealt says.

Continuing the Tradition

When Gealt became the museum’s third director, in 1986, her ambition was to advance Hope and Solley’s legacy of steady growth—in terms of both the museum’s holdings and its stature. One way of ensuring that future was to create a significant endowment.

“Having a healthy endowment is crucial for everything a museum does, from growing collections to hiring the best curators,” says Gealt. “When I took over, there was no endowment at all. Today it’s around \$15 million.”

Gealt has also established the museum’s national advisory board, overseen the endowment of new curatorial and conservation positions, initiated scholarships and fellowships for undergraduate and graduate students, and enhanced the museum’s public programming and outreach. She hopes to continue to grow the museum’s collection and to renovate and expand the gallery spaces.

“It’s an honor to continue the work begun by Henry Hope and carried on by Tom Solley, whose vision and dedication laid an incredible foundation,” Gealt says. “The IU Art Museum is an invaluable resource for IU faculty and students and for Bloomington generally. Having the opportunity to simply walk into the building and see these amazing works of art is uplifting. It offers insights into the human spirit.”



TREASURES

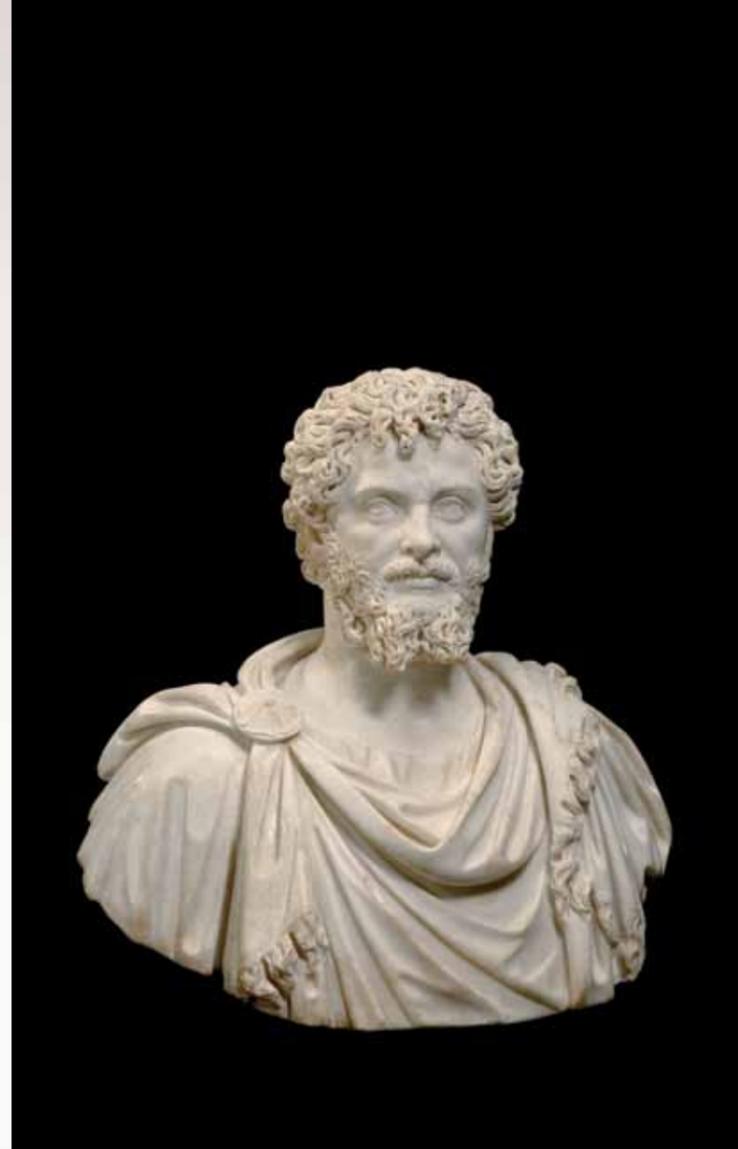
Ancient Egypt, Near East, and the Classical World



ANATOLIAN, HATTIAN OR EARLY HITTITE
End of 3rd millennium B.C. • Gold, solid cast

Bull Statuette

Dating from the Hattian or Early Hittite culture of Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) in the 3rd millennium B.C., this jewel-size, one-inch-high bull, made of pure gold, is the oldest sculpture in the museum's collection. Juliet Istrabadi, Acting Curator of Ancient Art, suspects that the tiny statuette may have been the head of a large pin used to clasp a ceremonial garment. For Istrabadi, the piece is remarkable not only for its great age but also for the contrast between the finely wrought, naturalistic details of the head—the expressive face, slightly flared nostrils, and slightly open mouth—and the abstraction of the body. "He [the bull] is ancient but also very modern looking," says Istrabadi. "It looks like a real bull but is gorgeous in its simplicity and elegance of presentation." *Gift of Dr. Leo Mildenberg in honor of Burton Y. Berry, 2001.12*



ROMAN (ITALY, PROBABLY MADE IN ROME)
ca. 201-211 • Marble

Portrait Bust of Emperor Septimius Severus

Known as the "African Emperor," Severus hailed from Lepcis Magna, a Roman colony in ancient Libya. He rose to power under Emperor Marcus Aurelius, became a Roman consul—one of the most powerful political positions in the Roman world—in A.D. 190, and seized power in 193, replacing Marcus Aurelius' son, Commodus (the villain in the movie *Gladiator*) as emperor.

The bust is notable, Istrabadi says, not only for its unmatched workmanship but also for the political signals it sends. The image depicts the emperor as virtuous and determined, brimming with vigor and wisdom. The cloak and brooch, those of a military commander, communicate that Severus is powerful but not too powerful, wealthy but not obscenely rich. The sculpture's curly hair and beard and four corkscrew curls adorning the forehead link the emperor to the Greco-Egyptian god Serapis, emphasizing Severus' African roots.

"The piece is very naturalistic; it looks like a real human being looking back at you," Istrabadi says, "and it's also a great piece of political propaganda." *Gift of Thomas T. Solley, 75.33.1*



EDO PEOPLES • KINGDOM OF BENIN, NIGERIA
Middle Period, 1600-1700 • Brass

Commemorative Head of an Oba

Made during the 17th century by an unknown sculptor of the Edo people in the kingdom of Benin (in what is today Nigeria), this 11 1/2-inch piece would have commemorated a dead Oba, or king. According to Diane Pelrine, the museum's Wielgus Curator of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, the head is one of the finest examples of metal sculpture from sub-Saharan Africa of the period.

An interesting aspect of the sculpture is how it was created. Brass workers first made a beeswax model cast over a clay core. The wax was then covered with layers of smooth and rough clay, and once the clay was dry, the workers heated the model

to melt the wax and pour it out. The vacated shell was then filled with molten brass. After the brass had cooled and solidified, the outer clay layers were removed, leaving the brass figure to be cleaned and polished.

This sculpture is also remarkable for the fineness of its casting and as a reminder of the divine aspect of Edo kings. "They were believed to be and believed themselves to be gods," Pelrine says. "The vacant stare indicates impartiality and balance, showing that the king remained above the fray. He was in this world but not of it." 75.98

Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas



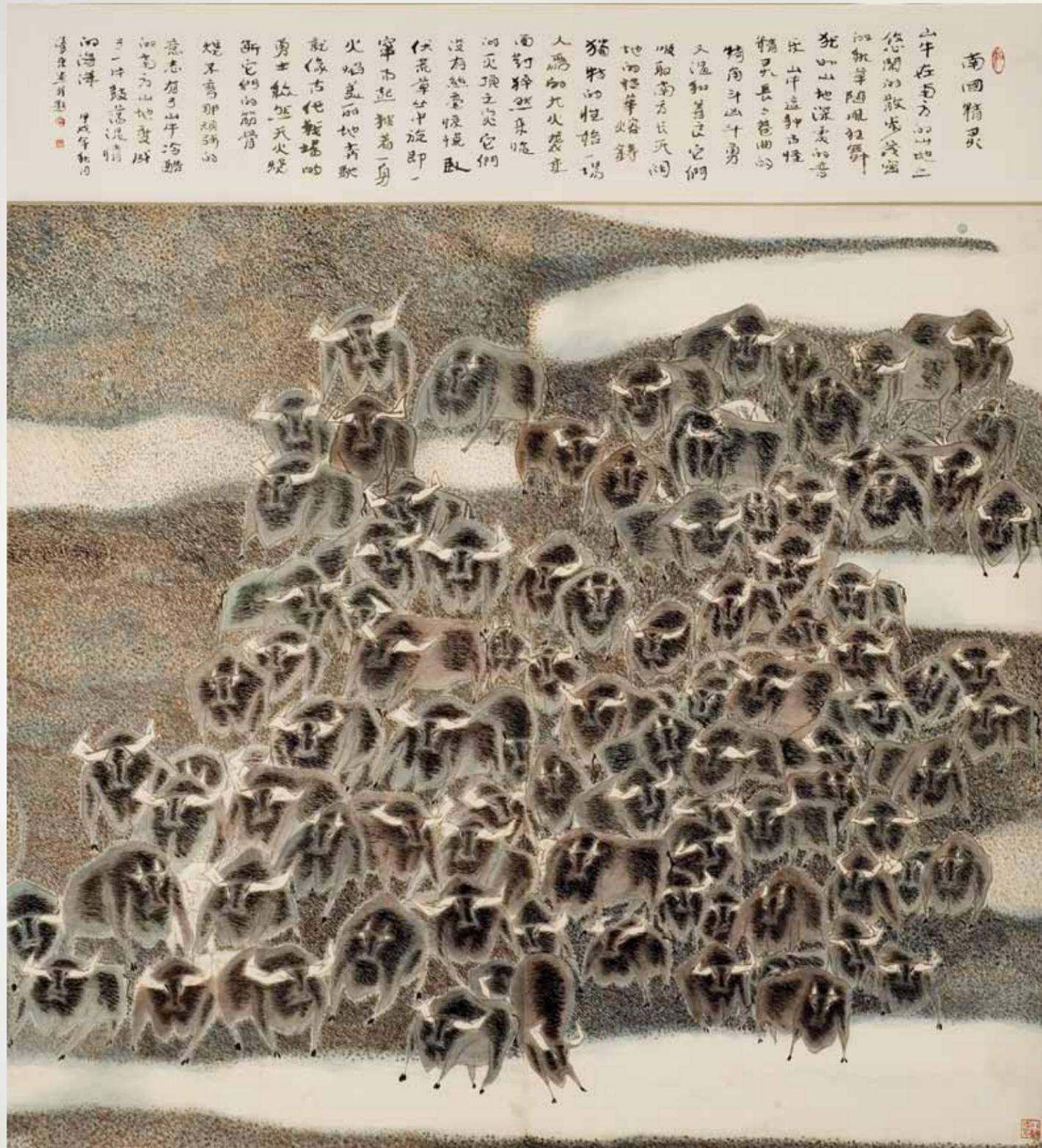
OLMEC STYLE • SANTA CRUZ, MEXICO
Early Formative Period, 1200-900 B.C. • Clay, pigment

Vessel in the Form of an Old Woman

Originating from Santa Cruz, Mexico, and dating from 1200-900 B.C., this clay vessel 8 1/2-inches high comes from the Olmec culture, an ancient civilization predating the Mayans and Aztecs. "It's been publicly called one of the most powerful sculptures ever made in pre-Columbian Mexico," says Pelrine. "The vessel's power rests in its incredible expression."

While images of women were common in Olmec culture, depictions of old women were rare, especially in the form of a vessel. And although theories abound as to the vessel's function and significance, its true nature remains a mystery. "The woman may be giving birth, kneeling in a traditional birthing posture, or it could be an image of deformity or illness, or a combination of both," Pelrine says. The vessel could also be an image of an Olmec deity, specifically the mother of all gods and humans.

"Whatever its original symbolic nature, this piece is simply striking when you stand in front of it," Pelrine says. *Raymond and Laura Wielgus Collection, 2010.49*



Quan Handong
CHINESE, B. 1956
1994 • Ink and color on paper

**Oxen, Series # 6,
"The Spirits of the South"**

This large painting (nearly 8 feet by 4 1/2 feet, including drape, not shown) by contemporary Chinese artist Quan Handong (b. 1956) is a striking example of the artist's interest in using traditional Chinese painting techniques to explore modern issues, says Judy Stubbs, the Pamela Buell Curator of Asian Art. "The painting is in one sense very modern, reading in an abstract, almost Cubist sense as a series of light and dark patterns. It takes a bit of looking to see that these are actually oxen. But the technique, ink on paper, is traditional and very demanding. Once you start, you can't stop, and it has to be right the first time or the entire painting is ruined."

The writing at the top, read from right to left, top to bottom, is a meditation on the dual nature of mountain oxen, which are inherently gentle but fierce when provoked or threatened. For Stubbs, the powerful massing of the oxen might reference the tenacity of Chinese artists and thinkers in the face of Mao Zedong's violent and destructive Cultural Revolution. *Gift of Robert and Sara LeBien, 2006.518, © Quan Handong*



JAPAN
Late 13th–early 14th century
Wood with pigments and lacquer

Shotoku Taishi at Age Two

This 27 1/2-inch Japanese wood sculpture, from the late 13th or early 14th century, captures an important moment in Japanese legend and history. A powerful and brilliant statesman and scholar, Taishi is credited with developing Japan's first constitution, in A.D. 604. According to legends that sprung up soon after his death in the 7th century, Taishi was also Buddha reincarnate, giving rise to a cult, Shotoku. According to his mythology, at the age of two Taishi spontaneously turned eastward and chanted the prayer *Namu Amida Butsu*, "Take refuge

in the Buddha Amida." The statue represents this moment.

Although many examples of such sculpture exist in Japan, the museum's is one of only a few in Western collections. Notes Stubbs, "I like that the artist is sensitive to merging a babyish face with the solemn face of an educated, tutored monk. Young children like this piece because in it they see something that looks like them." *William Lowe Bryan Memorial Fund, 59.26*



Felipe Vigarny
BURGUNDIAN, ACTIVE SPAIN, CA. 1475-1542
ca. 1515 • Polychromed relief: tempera and
gold leaf on wood

Presentation in the Temple

One of eight panels in the museum's Life of the Virgin cycle by Felipe Vigarny, this panel, dated to 1515, depicts Mary and Joseph bringing the infant Jesus to the High Temple in Jerusalem. The work is interesting for several reasons, beginning with the artist's unusual career. French by birth but trained in the Italian Renaissance style of painting, Vigarny settled and worked mainly in the Spanish cultural center of Burgos (in Spain's Castile region) and is credited with introducing the Italian Renaissance style there.

According to Adelheid Gealt, the museum's director and Curator of Western Art Before 1800, the painting of

tempera and gold leaf on wood is remarkable for its many arresting details, such as the ornate detail of Mary's robe and the gold leaf windows simulating the effect of light passing through stained glass. "It's an impressive blend of sculpture, painting, and decoration and a striking example of how the artist was able to use his Italian training to please a Spanish audience," says Gealt. "We've had visiting Spanish scholars remark on just how spectacular these panels are." *William Lowe Bryan Memorial*, 65.50



Gerard ter Borch
DUTCH, 1617-1681
ca. 1655 • Oil on canvas

Portrait of a Lady

One of the more famous and highly acclaimed portrait painters of his day, Dutch artist Gerard ter Borch was known for his ability to render textures and for depicting subjects with a delicate mix of honesty and empathy. Of note in this portrait, Gealt says, is the naturalness and subtle complexity of the rendering. The titular Lady is presented without makeup or other cosmetic touches to beautify her appearance. The mouth hints at a smile while her eyes, gazing calmly and directly at the viewer, suggest a full range of human emotions beneath a placid exterior.

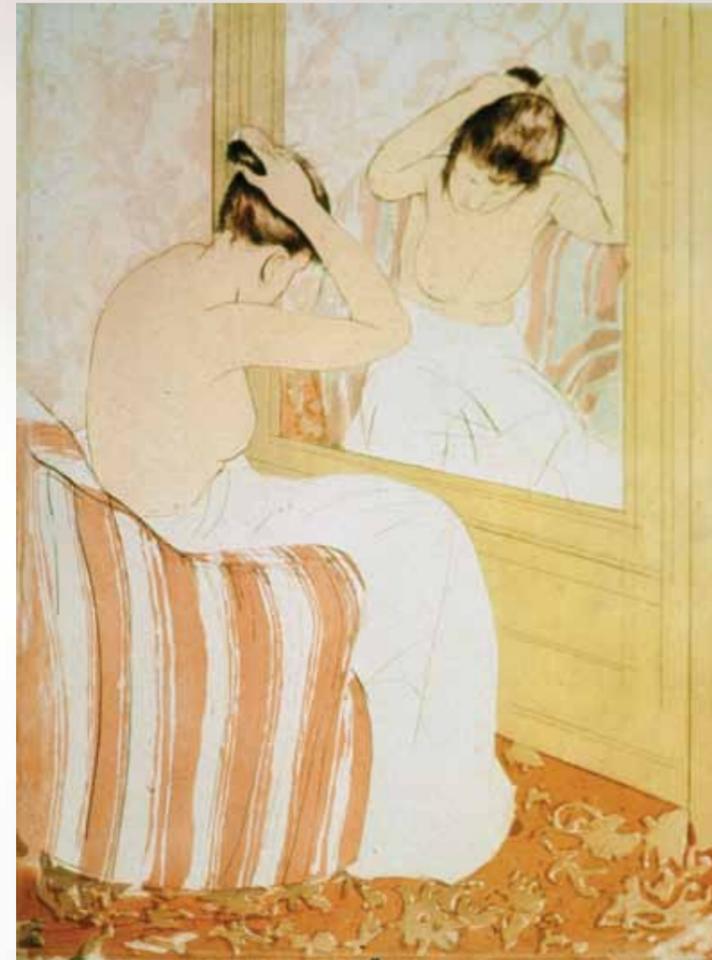
"Borch should be a household name," Gealt says. "He's able, through paint, to exude a sense of life. There's no doubt you're looking at a real person in this painting. The more you look at her, the more alive she becomes." 77.78

Master of the Holy Kinship
GERMAN, FLOURISHED COLOGNE
ca. 1475–ca. 1515 • Oil on panel

The Adoration of the Magi

Created in the late 15th century by an unknown German painter known as Master of the Holy Kinship, this painting (the most famous attributed to this artist) was originally the left wing of a three-part altarpiece. Like many works of the period, it's filled with a mind-boggling array of opulent, finely rendered details and compelling portraits. The central figure, of course, is Mary, cradling the newborn Jesus. Kneeling before him is Caspar, the first king of Cologne (where the painting is set and where the artist lived and worked), offering gifts. The specific rendering of the king's face suggests a portrait, almost certainly of the work's patron. Other striking portraits include Balthazar, the dark-skinned African king at the painting's left edge, and a young man in a dark cap gazing directly at the viewer, which might be a self-portrait of the artist.

"It's an example of high artistic brilliance," says Gealt. "To have such a high quality painting from northern Europe is truly amazing." *Given in memory of Mrs. Nicholas H. Noyes, 78.621*



Mary Cassatt
AMERICAN (ACTIVE IN FRANCE), 1844–1926
1890–91 • Color drypoint and aquatint on paper

The Coiffure

If this print appears vaguely Asian in technique and subject matter, that's because the American artist, Mary Cassatt, became interested in Japanese art after seeing an exhibition of Japanese woodblock prints in Paris in 1890. According to Nan Brewer, the Lucienne M. Glaubinger Curator of Works on Paper, this print is part of a series of ten works dating from the late 19th century and is one of the best examples of Cassatt's fascination with Japanese aesthetics. For example, Brewer points out, the prominently displayed nape of the subject's neck is a nod to traditional Japanese notions of beauty, as is the rose and peach palette and delicate tone of the figure's skin.

"Cassatt's use of the drypoint process [a printmaking technique in which the image is carved into the surface of a metal plate] creates a rich textural quality for the woman's hair," says Brewer. Cassatt also uses the process to "capture a beautiful array of patterns in the wallpaper, carpet, and chair."

Adds Brewer, "Cassatt is one of the Western world's most famous women artists and one of the very few women involved in the French Impressionist movement. We are fortunate to have this work." 76.145

Julia Margaret Cameron
BRITISH, 1815–1879
August 1872 • Albumen print

A Holy Family

A late starter, British photographer Julia Margaret Cameron began her photographic career at age 48 yet quickly emerged as one of the best art photographers of the late 19th century. The wife of a wealthy, retired jurist, Cameron had both the time and means to explore the new medium, using family, friends, and household staff as her models.

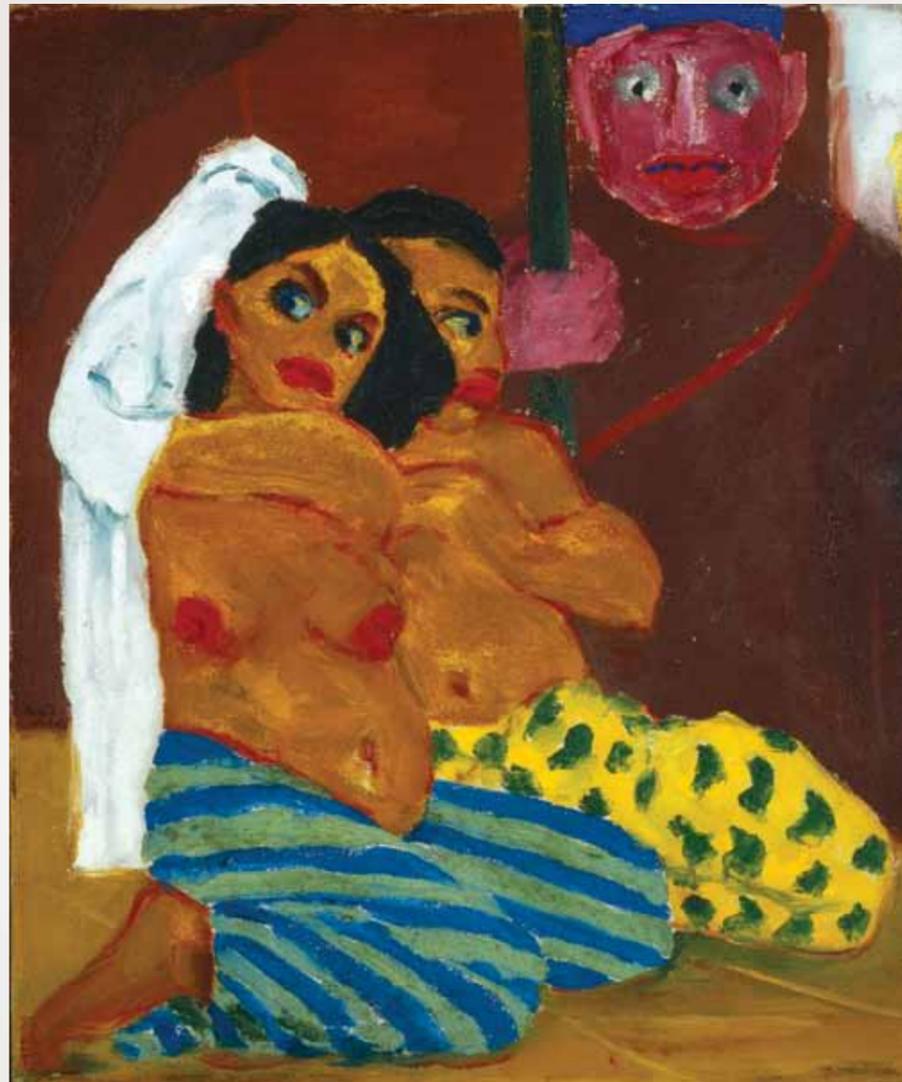
In this work, created in 1872, the central, angelic figure is Mary Hillier, Cameron's parlor maid. The other subjects are local children from the Isle of Wight, where Cameron lived. "The realism of the medium juxtaposed against [Cameron's] personal iconography often resulted in idealized images, blurring the line between portraiture, allegory, religious imagery, and genre," Brewer says. "This image recalls a Renaissance painting of the Madonna, Christ Child, and a young John the Baptist."

According to Brewer, Cameron was perhaps the first photographer who had a clearly defined theory of her art. In a letter to her mentor, British scientist and experimental photographer Sir John Herschel, she wrote: "My aspirations are to ennoble photography and to secure for it the character and uses of high art by combining the real and the ideal and sacrificing nothing of truth by all possible devotion to poetry and beauty." *Gift of Roy and Sophie Sieber, 78.22*



TREASURES

Art of the Western World After 1800

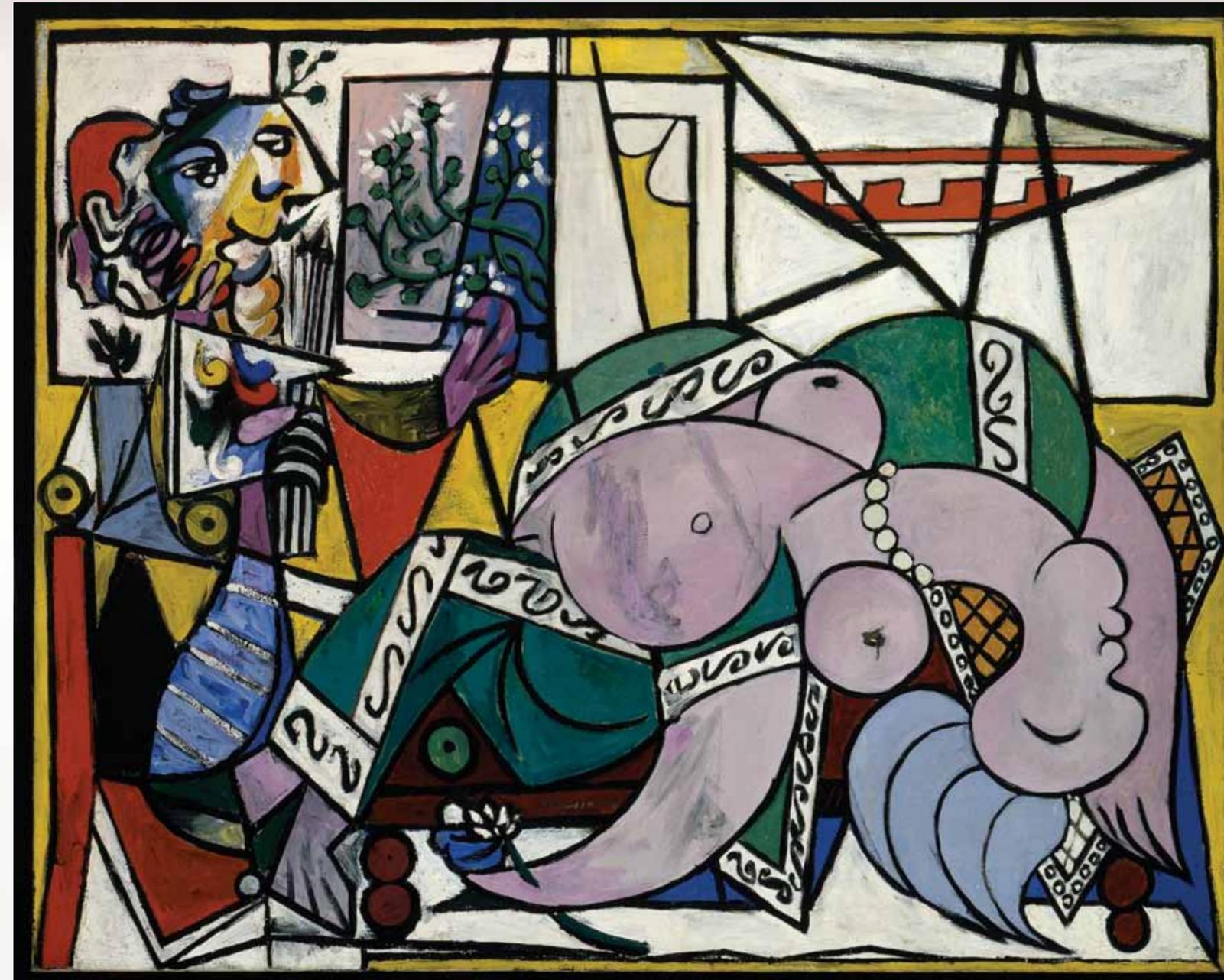


Emil Nolde
GERMAN, 1867-1956
1912 • Oil on canvas

***Nudes and Eunuch* (Keeper of the Harem)**

This work, by German expressionist Emil Nolde, is fascinating as much for its history as for its aesthetic brilliance, according to Jenny McComas, the museum's Class of 1949 Curator of Western Art After 1800. When Nolde debuted the painting in 1912, it was celebrated for its exotic topic and modern reinterpretation of 19th-century harem scenes. But when the Nazis came to power in 1933, propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels ordered the destruction and confiscation of thousands of works of "degenerate" art, including *Nudes and Eunuch*. Despite having joined the Nazi party, Nolde saw his reputation as an artist crumble overnight. He was barred from painting and, perhaps even worse, witnessed *Nudes and Eunuch* featured in the infamous "Degenerate Art" exhibition in Munich in 1937.

"Fortunately, Nolde's brother-in-law, a Danish citizen, was able to buy several of his confiscated works from the Nazis," says McComas. "He returned some of them to Nolde and sold others through a gallery. We're lucky to have one." *Jane and Roger Wolcott Memorial, gift of Thomas T. Solley, 76.70, © Nolde Stiftung Seebüll*



Pablo Picasso
SPANISH (ACTIVE IN
FRANCE) 1881-1973
June 1934 • Oil on canvas

The Studio

Among the museum's many Pablo Picasso prints and other works, *The Studio* is the most significant. In what many readers will recognize as Picasso's signature style, the painting is, according to McComas, "a personal, self-conscious artistic statement about the role of the artist in the creative process vis-à-vis his female subject." The subject in question is Marie-Thérèse Walter, Picasso's 17-year-old mistress who, about a year after posing for the painting, gave birth to the artist's daughter. (Their relationship ended not long after.) The painting depicts the female subject as a passive muse composed of round,

organic shapes, in stark contrast to the sharp, angular representation of Picasso himself standing at his easel.

The Studio was purchased by Henry and Sally Hope while on their honeymoon in New York City in the summer of 1944. They bought the painting from a gallery owned by Paul Rosenberg, a Jewish art dealer who had acquired *The Studio* directly from Picasso in 1934. When the Nazis invaded France in 1940, Rosenberg sent the painting ahead to save it from Nazi confiscation and soon followed, himself. *Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Henry R. Hope, 69.55, © 2013 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York*