ABOUT THE ART

Art Since 1950

Gallery 12

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ACKLAND ART MUSEUM
The University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill
101 S. Columbia Street
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MUSEUM HOURS
Wed – Sat 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Sun 1 – 5 p.m.
Closed Mondays & Tuesdays.
Closed July 4th, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve,
Christmas Day, & New Year’s Day.
Edward Melcarth
American, 1914 – 1973

Manhole, 1959
oil on canvas, 70 x 70 in.
Photography by Edward C. Robison III.

About the Art

• This painting, with its suggestive title, celebrates the young male working class body, a recurring theme for Edward Melcarth who was a communist and openly gay.

• The unusual composition with the dramatic view from above seems to rotate around the empty center.

• Various objects throughout the painting evoke Christian symbolism: the dove of the Holy Spirit at upper left, the tools of the Crucifixion at lower right, and the ladder of the Descent from the Cross at the center.

• Melcarth once described his art as Social Romanticism, which “attempts to describe man’s idealized view of himself using the techniques closer to the Renaissance,” taking ordinary subjects and rendering them “extraordinary.”

About the Artist

1914: Born Edward Epstein in Louisville, Kentucky. Later changed his surname to Melcarth, an ancient Phoenician god.
1930s: Studied at Harvard University, with artist Karl Zerbe in Boston, Massachusetts, and with printmaker Stanley Hayter in Paris, France
1942: The Museum of Fine Arts Boston acquired his self portrait
1950: Named one of the best American artists by Life Magazine
1959: Painted Manhole
1967: Painted commissioned murals at the Pierre Hotel in New York City, New York
Late 1960s: Left New York for Venice, Italy, where he focused on sculpture
1973: Died in Venice
Sheila Gallagher  
American, born 1966  
**Plastic Lila**, 2013  
melted plastic on armature, 81 x 64 1/2 in. 
Photo: Stewart Clements Photography.

**About the Art**

- This work calls attention to the materials of its making: plastic items of myriad shapes, sizes, and colors, which the artist culls from the bins in her neighborhood or from trips abroad (in this case from a 2013 visit to India).

- Composing her materials expressively and intuitively, Gallagher creates sections of the painting on cookie sheets, which she heats on a standard household grill in the alley outside her studio. She then connects the sections and mounts them on a metal armature, making it into a seamless, impressive whole.

- Gallagher has written: “I was trained traditionally as a painter, but I find paint to be an incredibly burdensome tradition. So I’ve been essentially painting with things that aren’t paint. My big artistic theme is the mingling of the sacred and the profane, the trashy and the beautiful.”

**About the Artist**

1966: Born New Vernon, New York  
1996: Received MFA from Tufts University/School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts  
2003: Began teaching at Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts as associate professor  
2009-Present: Co-director of The Guestbook Project, devoted to creative peacebuilding with youth in divided communities  
2013: Made *Plastic Lila*  
2014: Participated in State of the Art: Discovering American Art Now exhibition at Crystal Bridges Museum of Art and other venues
Barkley L. Hendricks
American, 1945 – 2017

New London Niggah / Big Chuck (Charles Harvey), 1975
oil and acrylic on linen canvas
Ackland Fund, 2008.6

About the Art

• Barkley Hendricks sets a realistic figure against an unreal, abstract, blue field of color. The absence of any environment and of any objects in Charles Harvey’s hands emphasize the presence and power of his body.

• Hendricks matches the subject’s self-confident, proud pose with the title’s forceful use of a term that is a vernacular version of a traditional racial slur that is sometimes used by African Americans as a gesture of reclamation.

• Harvey was an acquaintance of Hendricks’ and posed for him on several occasions. Hendricks lent Harvey the Yale t-shirt he wears in this painting; he preferred the way its white color contrasted with the blue background to the black t-shirt Harvey had been wearing.

• Hendricks kept this painting for over thirty years, until the Ackland bought it in 2008.

About the Artist

1945: Born April 16 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
1967: Graduated from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia
1972: Graduated from Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, receiving a bachelor’s and master’s degree; began teaching at Connecticut College in New London
1975: Made the Ackland’s painting
1984-2002: Turned to photography instead of painting
2008: New London Niggah/Big Chuck (Charles Harvey) was included in the exhibition Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool, organized by the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina
2010: Retired from Connecticut College
2017: Died April 18 in New Haven, Connecticut
Julie Heffernan  
American, born 1956  
**Self-Portrait as Dirty Princess**, 2004  
oil on canvas  
Ackland Fund, 2005.2

**About the Art**

- Instead of a traditional ballgown, Julie Heffernan adorns her semi-nude body with a huge skirt composed of flowers, dead fish, and dead animals, combining elements of traditional portraiture with still life painting.

- Heffernan set this scene in the Long Gallery at the Royal Palace in Brussels, Belgium, which she represents in shimmering splendor. Light from a glowing chandelier and ornate sconces is reflected in the mirrored doors and the polished floor.

- By presenting a royal figure standing grandly in this lavish hall and dressed in an abundance of flora and fauna, Heffernan critiques the excesses of power — both historical and contemporary — in which decisions by those in authority can foment disorder and destruction in faraway places.

**About the Artist**

1956: Born in Peoria, Illinois  
1985: Graduated from Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, with a master’s degree in painting  
1992-93: Taught at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
1997: Began teaching at Montclair State University, Montclair, New Jersey  
2004: Painted the Ackland’s **Self-Portrait as Dirty Princess**  
2011: Elected National Academician to the National Academy of Design in New York, New York  
2014: Co-founded the online journal *Painters on Paintings*
Hung Liu
American, born in China,
born 1948–2021
Peaches, 2002
oil on canvas
Ackland Fund, 2002.7

About the Art

- The central figure in this painting is based on a historical photograph, one of a group of photographs of Chinese prostitutes that Hung Liu discovered in a Beijing archive in 1991.

- While in some places the oil paint is noticeably thick (as in the blossom at the woman’s collar), there are also drip marks extending down the surface of the canvas, made with much thinner mixtures of paint. The drips, together with the woman’s impassive expression, convey a mood of sadness.

- The peaches and bats (often symbols for happiness) swirling around the woman’s head were inspired by an eighteenth-century ceramic plate that the artist studied at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. An image of a similar plate is printed to the right.

About the Artist

1948: Born February 17 in Changchun, Jilin Province, China
1968: Worked as a farm worker during the Cultural Revolution in China
1981: Completed graduate study at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, China
1984: Immigrated to the United States; attended graduate school at the University of California at San Diego
1990: Began teaching at Mills College in Oakland, California
2002: Painted the Ackland’s Peaches
2014: Retired from Mills College
2021: Died August 7 in Oakland
Fritz Scholder
Native American, 1937 – 2005
**Indian and Storefront**, 1974
acrylic on canvas

### About the Art

- With brilliant yellow lines, Fritz Scholder divides the black and red areas of the background, marks the awning’s scalloped edge and three letters RKS, and delineates the placket, pointed collar, pocket flaps, and snaps of the man’s western-style shirt. Even amid the painting’s other saturated hues, the yellow stands out.

- While he was an art student, Scholder became familiar with two important mid-twentieth-century art movements: abstract expressionism with its gestural brushwork and pop art with its bright color palette. Both styles are reflected in his work, including *Indian and Storefront*.

- Between 1967 and 1980, he painted controversial depictions of what he described as “real Indians.” The year before he made this painting, he said:

  People don’t really like Indians. Oh, they like their own conceptions of the Indian — usually the Plains Indian, romantic and noble and handsome and somehow the embodiment of wisdom and patience. But Indians in America are usually poor, sometimes derelicts outside the value system, living in uncomfortable surroundings. We have really been viewed as something other than human beings by the larger society.

### About the Artist

1937: Born October 6 in Minnesota to parents of Native and European ancestry  
1957: Moved to Sacramento, California; studied art and exhibited throughout the region  
1964: Earned an MFA from University of Arizona; taught for a time at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico  
1972: Had a two-person exhibition with his former student, T.C. Cannon, organized by the Smithsonian and exhibited internationally  
1974: Painted *Indian and Storefront*; invited to have a one man show at the Basel V International Art Fair in Switzerland  
1984: Named a lifetime member of the prestigious Salon d’Automne in Paris  
2005: Died February 10 in Scottsdale, Arizona
About the Art

- The column of altered and mostly inverted ceramics might almost be a model for a modern monument.

- The artist has changed the china by removing parts of the decorative elements, leaving irregular patterns around the edges. She carefully cuts the china with a high-powered drill while holding the piece under water.

- The work is part of an ongoing series, begun in 2011, called *Heirloom*.

- The artist has described her practice, including the alteration of objects as “my methods for deconstructing domestic vignettes of traditional success and beauty. This labored breakdown of archetypes unveils a rot behind the shiny exterior while mirroring the cultural pressure to gloss over personal turmoil and carry on.”

- The work’s title refers to a type of cake made with layers of dough or batter deposited, one at a time, onto a tapered cylindrical rotating spit. Generally, spit cakes are associated with celebrations such as weddings and Christmas. This seems appropriate for the stacked layers of elegant and formal china.

About the Artist

1982: Born in Natick, Massachusetts
2009: Received MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield, Michigan
2014: Made *Spit Cake*
2014: Participated in State of the Art: Discovering American Art Now exhibition at Crystal Bridges Museum of Art and other venues
2015: Joined the University of North Carolina School of the Arts in Winston-Salem, North Carolina as assistant professor
2022: Joined Montserrat College of Art in Massachusetts as Associate Professor
Mel Kendrick
American, born 1949

*Untitled*, 1980
laminated pine, paint, and plaster
Gift of J. Kenneth Chance and Ellen Turner Chance, 2020.22.1

**About the Art**

- This sculpture is composed of simple wood pieces, including fragments of furniture elements that suggest a distorted chair. It explodes off the wall in a way that contradicts our expectations of traditional sculpture: that it be a more-or-less solid object placed on a pedestal or on the floor.

- Kendrick frequently explores the nature of sculpture, prompting viewers to look at the materiality and form of his works. In deconstructing and twisting a chair, Kendrick makes a recognizable form appear abstract.

- This is a relatively early work in the career of an artist who has for four decades made provocative investigations into the fundamentals and possibilities of sculpture.

**About the Artist**

1949: Born in Boston, Massachusetts
1974: Had his solo debut at Artist’s Space, New York
1980: Kendrick created *Untitled*
1985: Included in the Whitney Biennial
2009: Commissioned to create five sculptures for Madison Square Park
Aníbal Villacís  
Ecuadorian, 1927 – 2012  
**Untitled**, c. 1965  
oil and metal leaf on wood panel  
Gift of Caroline Taylor, 2021.4.2

### About the Art

- This painting’s seemingly flat surface is actually made up of several layers of color, including a metallic one, which have then in some places been sanded away to reveal strata of varying depths, even down to the wood support. Paint and gold leaf are layered upon wood and carved and sanded down to provide depth, creating a sculptural quality.

- Aníbal Villacís was one of the leading modern painters in Ecuador in the 1960s and 1970s. He traveled and studied in Europe in the 1950s. On his return to Ecuador, he was an important part of the artist collective VAN (Vanguardia Artística Nacional), a group which opposed the dominant visual culture of the time that was tied to social realist traditions.

- Around the time this painting was made, prominent critic José Gómez-Sicre wrote: “Aníbal Villacís, fascinated by the texture of rocks, massive forms, and hieroglyphics, creates works of pure fantasy written in the legacy of pre-Hispanic forms.”

### About the Artist

1927: Born in Ambato, Ecuador  
1949: Villacís began exhibiting work in his hometown  
1953–1959: Villacís studied in Paris and Madrid  
1960: Villacís returned to Ecuador  
c. 1960: Villacís and friends found the artists’ collective VAN (Vanguardia Artística Nacional)  
1962: Became the first Ecuadoran abstract artist to exhibit at the Pan American Union  
c. 1965: Villacís created *Untitled*  
2012: Died in Ecuador
Marc Swanson
American, born 1969
*Untitled (Looking Back Buck)*, 2004
crystals, polyurethane foam, and adhesive
Ackland Fund, 2012.11

**About the Art**

- Placed above eye level, *Looking Back Buck* recalls the way hunting trophies are hung on the wall. But most hunting trophies are not covered in glittering crystals, and the animal heads face forward, not back.

- A hunting trophy like this complicates the ideas of manliness often associated with such totems. There is also a hint of vulnerability in the exposed neck and head position.

- A son of a small-town New England hunter, Marc Swanson spent his twenties immersing himself in San Francisco’s gay culture scene. His artistic practice investigates the dualities inherent in these disparate life experiences.

**About the Artist**

1969: Born in New Britain, Connecticut
1990s: Moved to San Francisco, California
2004: Made the Ackland’s sculpture; graduated with a Master of Fine Arts degree from Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
2009: Commissioned to make an original, multiple-edition piece for the Norton Family Christmas Art Project
2012: Elected to the Board of Governors, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, Maine
About the Art

- This is a kind of landscape painting, though more a conceptual than representational one. It uses a mix of conventional and unconventional media applied over an almost completely obscured photograph.

- The title refers to the Brandenburg March, or Margravate, a sandy region of the northwestern lowlands of Germany, near Berlin. This area has witnessed great military events in German history. A popular patriotic song of the 1920s, *March Heath, March Sand* became a favorite of various Nazi organizations under Hitler’s dictatorship.

- Kiefer’s landscape evokes disaster and catastrophe, but also alludes to the redemptive power of art. A “frame” depicted as rough-hewn wood surrounds the scene, and the sand is formed into the shape of a painter’s palette.

About the Artist

1954: Born in Donaueschingen, Germany
1970: Studied at the Düsseldorf Academy in Düsseldorf, Germany, under Joseph Beuys
1980: Represented Germany at the Venice Biennale in Venice, Italy
1981: First exhibition in the United States; made *March Sand*
1992: Relocated to France
2007: Became the first artist in fifty years to install a permanent work at the Louvre Museum in Paris, France
2018: Was awarded Austrian citizenship
Leon Polk Smith
American, 1906 – 1996

New Moon for August, 1983
oil on canvas, shaped canvas: 97 x 48 3/4 in.
Photography by Edward C. Robison III.

About the Art

- Leon Polk Smith is often seen as one of the pioneers in using shaped canvases and hard-edge abstraction, modes of art making which flourished in the 1960s in particular.
- There is something almost sensual in the ways the painting’s parts approach, touch, and encounter each other.
- Although the white sliver and blue expanse seem to relate to the “moon” in the evocative title, the artist said in a 1993 interview: “I would sort of use a title, the first thing that came into my mind when I finished a painting. [...] Like I’d have finished a painting and I looked out the window and saw the little new moon that was in August, so I named the painting New Moon in August. [...] My titles are a bit like frames. I didn’t like frames on paintings, and I [don’t] care too much about titles but one has to use titles for convenience. I would certainly never attempt to use a title to help explain a painting.”
- Some writers have seen an affinity between the artist’s love of color, pattern, and geometric shape and his Native American heritage.

About the Artist

1906: Born in Chickasha, Territory of Oklahoma to parents who were both part Cherokee
1936: Moved to New York City, New York
1941: First exhibition, at Uptown Gallery in New York City
1965: Included in Museum of Modern Art exhibition “The Responsive Eye”
1966: Included in Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum exhibition “Systemic Painting”
1983: Painted New Moon for August
1995: Retrospective exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, New York City
1996: Died in New York City
About the Art

- Nevelson is known for her assemblage sculptures consisting of everyday items painted uniformly to create cohesion. Here, boxes are stacked against a wall and negative spaces between them are filled with moldings, spindles, dowels, and other fragments of furniture.

- The disparate objects, painted a monochromatic black, play with vertical lines and shapes and harken back to the Cubism and Constructivism movements, both of which used geometric shapes and lines to explore dimension and space.

- Although primarily a sculptor, Nevelson shared with the Abstract Expressionist painters who were her contemporaries an interest in creating large works that play with line, flatness, and scale. Although they appear as a collaged jumble, each piece has been deliberately placed, to evoke a sense of order.

About the Artist

1899: Born in Kiev, Russia
1905: Nevelson’s family emigrated to Maine
1930s: Nevelson traveled across Europe and studied with Hans Hofmann in Munich
1941: First solo exhibition at Nierendorf Gallery
1956: First major museum acquisition by the Whitney Museum of American Art
1967: First retrospective held by the Whitney Museum
1982: Nevelson created *Untitled*
1988: Died in New York, New York
About the Art

- Sam Gilliam was associated with the Washington Color School movement based in Washington, D.C. that included artists like Morris Louis (American, 1912 – 1962) and Kenneth Noland (American, 1924 – 2010). Artists within the movement had a shared appreciation for large areas of color frequently applied directly to the canvas. Gilliam often achieved this effect through staining colors onto the canvas.

- *Fire* was made in an edition of sixty-seven using the lithographic process. Printmakers achieve the lithographic process at its most basic by utilizing the repulsion of oil and water on a flat surface.

- The “rice paper” support for this print refers to a lightweight paper made from the bark of the mulberry tree. It is characterized for having visible natural fibers that create texture.

About the Artist

1933: Born on November 30 in Tupelo, Mississippi
1963: Introduced to artists within the Washington Color School, a movement concerned with color painting
C. 1965: Became the first painter to popularize the unsupported canvas
1972: Printed *Fire* with the Impressions Workshop in Boston, Massachusetts; became the first Black artist to represent the United States at the 36th Venice Biennale
1980: Awarded an honorary doctorate of Humane Letters from his alma mater, the University of Louisville in Louisville, Kentucky
2017: Represented the United States at the 57th Venice Biennale for the second time in his career
2022: Died on June 25 in Washington, D.C.
About the Art

- Herb Jackson has a distinguished career as a painter whose canvases are created by building up many layers of paint and scraping portions off, a stark contrast to the process of lithography, which is planographic (printed from a flat surface, as opposed to printed from raised or incised surfaces).

- Jackson says the titles of all of his works are meant to be “associative rather than definitive.” Depending on an individual viewer's perspective, the title Oriental could prompt a wide range of associations.

- This 1973 print, like Sam Gilliam’s 1972 Fire lithograph installed alongside it, was created at the Impressions Workshop in Boston, Massachusetts. While the two artists’ projects did not overlap at Impressions, they did meet each other many times in their careers.

About the Artist

1945: Born on August 18 in Raleigh, North Carolina
1970: Earned his MFA in Studio Art at UNC-Chapel Hill
1973: Printed Oriental with Impressions Workshop in Boston, Massachusetts
1982: Awarded an endowed chair position in the art department at Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina
1999: Presented with the North Carolina Award by Governor Jim Hunt
2011: Retired from teaching art at Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina
2015: Presented with the North Caroliniana Society Award for extraordinary contributions to North Carolina’s cultural heritage
Mark Tansey
American, born 1949
Landscape, 1994
oil on canvas, 71 3/4 x 144 1/2 in.
(182.2 x 367.0 cm)
© Mark Tansey.

About the Art

- We see a large mound of randomly discarded and damaged sculptures – bust portraits and statues of powerful men and mythological figures from across history and culture, such as Joseph Stalin, Abraham Lincoln, Adolf Hitler, Julius Caesar, George Washington, and Constantine I, among unspecified Egyptian pharaohs, Mayan kings, Greek kouroi, the Sphinx, and more.

- The monumental scene is meticulously rendered in a reddish-brown monochrome that evokes an old, faded photograph, a fragile document of history.

- On the back, in addition to the title and date, the artist has written “Colossii,” the Latin word for statues of gigantic propositions and, by extension, people of immense significance.

- The artist’s creative process is slow and meticulous, as he selects image material from his extensive archive, combines it into elaborate collages, photocopies and re-photocopies the composition in the search for the density and contrast he seeks, and then uses the result as the basis for the painting.

- The artist has written, “In my work, I’m searching for pictorial functions that are based on the idea that the painted picture knows itself to be metaphorical, rhetorical, transformational, fictional.”

About the Artist

1949: Born in San Jose, California, into a family of art historians
1969: Enrolled at Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles
1974: Moved to New York City, New York and enrolled in the graduate program at Hunter College
1990: Had a major retrospective exhibition, Mark Tansey: Art and Source, shown in Seattle, Washington, Montreal, Canada, St. Louis, Missouri, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Fort Worth, Texas
1994: Painted Landscape