

## Akron Beacon Journal

### Art review: Akron museum shares past as it celebrates centennial

By: Anderson Turner



"Share the Past, Create the Future: Selections from the Akron Art Museum Collection" is on view through April 2023.

Museums are not static places. They grow and change. More often than not, institutions such as art museums reflect the triumphs and the challenges of the community in which they exist.

In recent years, the Akron Art Museum has gone through some tough challenges. A group of employees who had been laid off at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic aired complaints about alleged workplace violations that included racism, sexism and bullying of employees by supervisors. The complaints led to the resignation in May 2020 of then-director Mark Masuoka. The two years since that time have seen the museum work to address these issues and recover from the upheaval in the workplace and the challenges of the pandemic that have affected the arts sector throughout the world.

"Share the Past, Create the Future: Selections from the Akron Art Museum Collection" has been created in celebration of the museum's centennial. The galleries are exhibiting 104 artworks by more than 70 artists from the museum's collection and organized around one of the following themes: "The Otherworldly and the Fantastic," "The Political Landscape," "Realism," "Images of Blackness," "Abstraction" and "The Natural World." This reinstallation almost doubles the number of artists represented in the collection galleries, including 19 women and 18 artists of color as well as 25 works never shown before.

This isn't your typical museum collection display and the approach of the curators in choosing the objects has been thoughtfully executed. The works highlight the international vision of the collection as well as the quality of regional artists.



The Akron Art Museum is exhibiting more than 100 works from its collection.

Akron native Timothy App is one of the artists in the “Abstraction” section. App grew up taking classes at the Akron Art Institute (now Akron Art Museum) and later studied at Kent State University with Leroy Flint, the Akron institute’s former director. App is known for combining his appreciation of precision and logic with open-ended exploration of materials and colors.

The painting “Bacchanal,” a 2005 acrylic on canvas, started with Italian Renaissance painter Titian's “Bacchanal of the Andrians,” which App simplified into geometric forms. Instead of an outdoor depiction of group figures in various stages of undress and movement. We find ourselves beholding geometric shapes that range in color from black to mostly earth tones and then almost white. Despite the complete removal of the representative qualities of the original painting, App is able to retain the movement and energy of the original painting.

Flint’s work “Constellation of Hot and Cold Suns,” a 1966 acrylic on canvas, hangs nearby. In this painting, a blue field features multicolored dots in various sizes. It looks like a constellation in the night sky. There is a push and pull in the composition and the location and size of the featured dots that help to create dimensionality.

One of the more intriguing works on display is “Les pas perdus (The Wasted Footsteps),” a little-known painting by Belgian artist René Magritte. This 1950 oil on canvas features a large eagle that has turned to stone. A mountainous landscape is shown behind the eagle and other birds can be seen flying in the distance. As it turns out, Magritte painted over 20 works between 1950 and 1951 that focused on petrification because he was afraid of becoming paralyzed in stone. This is an intimate painting that helps highlight the explorations in the unconscious, dreams, sexuality and fantasy that helped make this artist so famous. Indeed, each section of this collection has works that hold your attention and challenge your assumptions about what the Akron Art Museum is and has been throughout its history.

There is a lot happening in the visual arts this summer, including the return of the FRONT International Triennial to Northeast Ohio. “Share the Past, Create the Future: Selections from the Akron Art Museum Collection” is an equally important stop for those of us who love and treasure our community.