

Figurative Painting from the Collection

January–July 2022

Learning Guide

sheldon

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The figurative works in this gallery focus attention on artists who use their subjects as both the reason to make art and the embodiment of historical or personal moments. Spanning a period of almost 120 years, these works demonstrate continuity in art's potential to depict the breadth of human experience and evolution in its capacity to express identity. The installation includes paintings by Aaron Douglas and Robert Henri from early in the twentieth century and recent works by Philemona Williamson and Shoshanna Weinberger, who explore contemporary complexities of identity, beauty norms, gender, and ethnicity.

Exhibition support is provided by Roseann and Phil Perry and Rhonda Seacrest.

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ROBERT COLESCOTT

Knowledge of the Past is the Key to the Future: The Other Washingtons



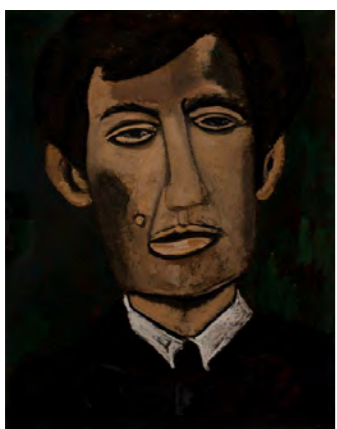
AARON DOUGLAS

Window Cleaning



MARK FLOOD

Vote for Law and Order (Orange on Aqua)



MARSDEN HARTLEY

Young Worshipper of the Truth



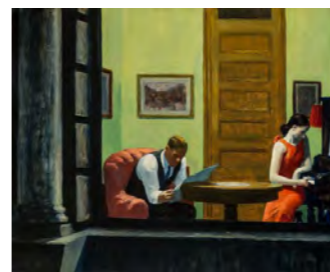
ROBERT HENRI

Edith Dimock Glackens



ROBERT HENRI

Maria y Consuelo



EDWARD HOPPER

Room in New York



ROBERT INDIANA

The Triumph of Tira



WALT KUHN

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Meal II

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JOYCE PENSATO

Mr. MotoMickey



NEIL WELLIVER

Dark Canoe



PHILEMONA WILLIAMSON

Food For Thought



FAIRFIELD PORTER

Anne, Lizzie and Katie



NORMAN ROCKWELL

The County Agricultural Agent



YINKA SHONIBARE CBE

*The Sleep of Reason
Produces Monsters
(America)*



FRANCISCO DE GOYA

*El sueño de la razón produce
monstruos [The sleep of
reason produces monsters]*



SHOSHANNA WEINBERGER

*Bouffant: Weighted and
Balanced*



ROBERT COLESCOTT

Oakland, CA 1925-Tucson, AZ 2009

Knowledge of the Past is the Key to the Future: The Other Washingtons

Acrylic on canvas, 1987

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Olga N. Sheldon Acquisition Trust

U-6463.2015



ROBERT COLESCOTT

*Knowledge of the Past is the Key to the Future:
The Other Washingtons*

*I am not a writer. I present an image that can
leave it to you to write the story.*

—Robert Colescott

Robert Colescott is best known for his improvisational, large-scale canvases that comment on class, gender, sexuality, and race in a satirical manner. The key elements of Colescott's mature work—vivid color, complex narrative, and monumental scale—were the product of travel and studying abroad. In the 1970s, Colescott began to reinterpret famous American and European paintings through an African American lens, inserting both well-known and anonymous Black figures into the compositions.

This painting depicts individuals—famous, infamous, and unsung—who share a well-established surname. The fact that Washington was the name most frequently chosen by formerly enslaved people in the US to assert their rightful freedom is underscored by the inclusion of the profile of George Washington, himself an enslaver.



AARON DOUGLAS
Topeka, KS 1899-Nashville, TN 1979

Window Cleaning
Oil on canvas, 1935

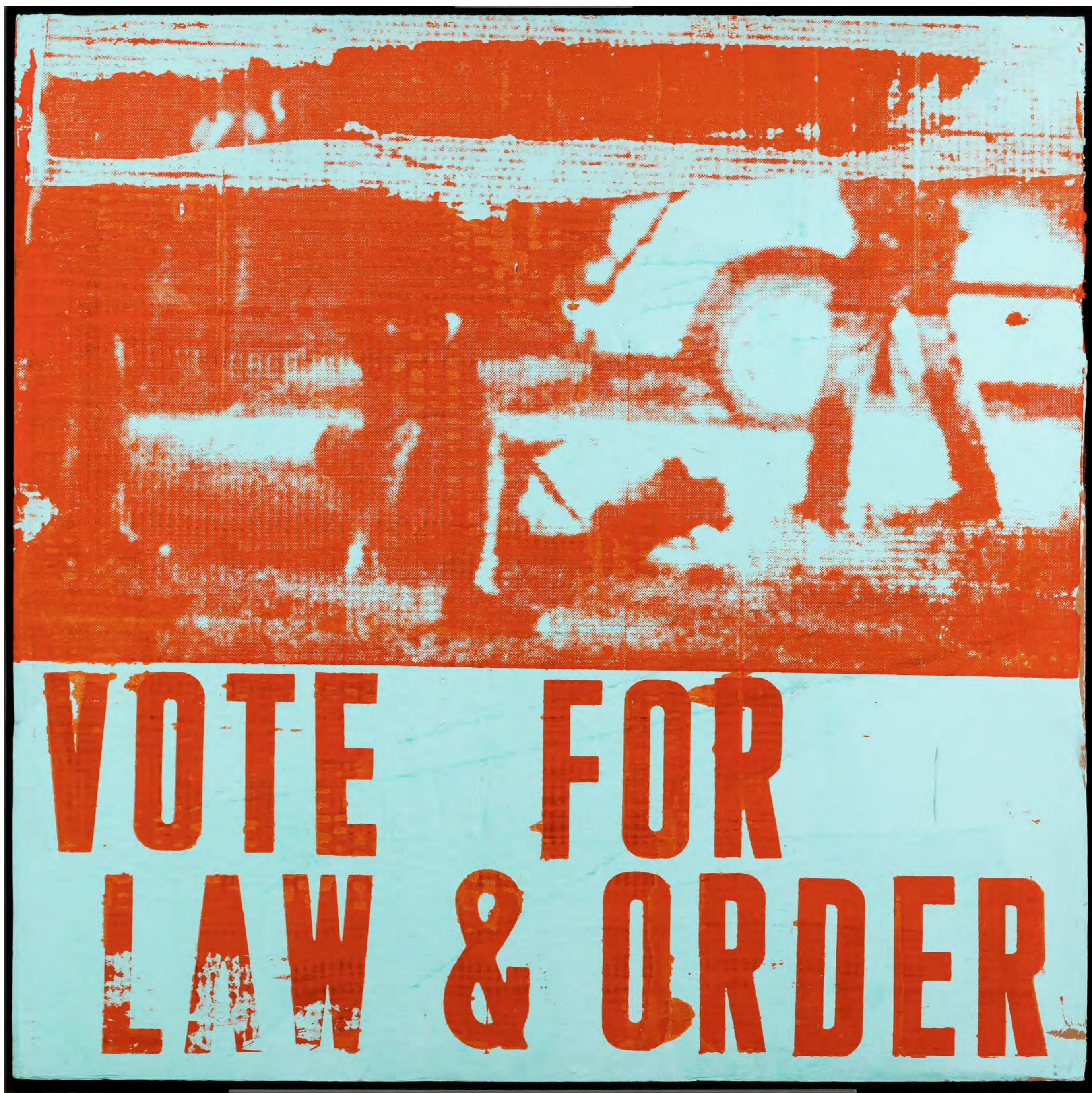
Nebraska Art Association
N-40.1936

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AARON DOUGLAS
Window Cleaning

Born in Kansas, Aaron Douglas graduated from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in 1922 and moved to New York City in 1925. He became a leader in the Harlem Renaissance after establishing himself as an illustrator for influential publications such as Alain Locke’s *The New Negro* and James Weldon Johnson’s collection of poems *God’s Trombones*. In the painting *Window Cleaning*, Douglas offers a quiet, intimate scene of work in an urban dwelling. The canvas, like those of other artists working during the Great Depression, focuses attention on the work of an ordinary person, exploring and commemorating the routine patterns and events of everyday life.

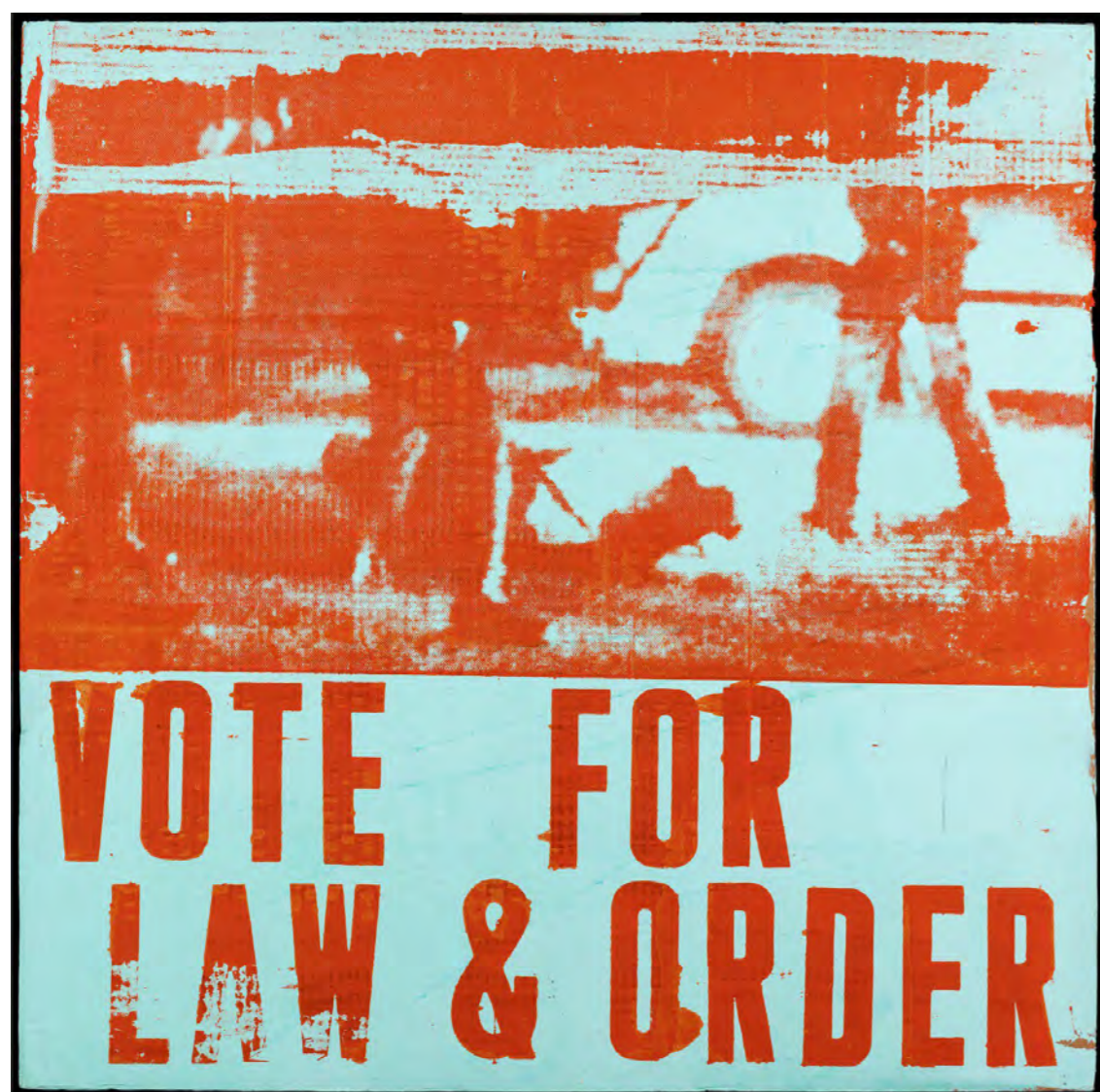


MARK FLOOD
born Houston, TX 1957

Vote for Law and Order (Orange on Aqua)
Acrylic silkscreened on cardboard prepared with house paint, 1992

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Olga N. Sheldon Acquisition Trust
U-6907.2020

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MARK FLOOD

Vote for Law and Order (Orange on Aqua)

Silkscreened above the words “vote for law & order” is a reproduction of a grainy video still of Los Angeles police officers beating Black motorist Rodney King at the conclusion of a high-speed chase on March 3, 1991. Four officers kicked and beat King for a reported fifteen minutes, as more than a dozen additional officers looked on. A bystander, George Holliday, captured nine minutes of King’s beating on a camcorder, and the footage, from which the video still was taken, was broadcast globally.

On April 29, 1992, the four officers were acquitted of charges of excessive use of force. Mark Flood created *Vote for Law and Order (Orange on Aqua)* a few months later, as one of approximately fifty cardboard protest signs to be carried in demonstrations and marches organized against the 1992 Republican National Convention held in Houston in August. According to Flood, the silkscreened signs were “intended to disrupt the thinking of the viewer, rather than to instruct or inform.” Presenting the recognizable image of King’s beating with the call to vote for law and order “was clearly sarcasm,” he states.



MARSDEN HARTLEY

Lewiston, ME 1877-Ellsworth, ME 1943

Young Worshipper of the Truth

Oil on panel, 1940

Nebraska Art Association

Nelle Cochrane Woods Memorial

N-348.1976

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MARSDEN HARTLEY
Young Worshipper of the Truth

Saw a beautiful large picture of Lincoln last night in a book shop window ... face so full of courage and hope ... I am simply dead in love with that man.

—Marsden Hartley, writing to his niece in 1939

I have walked up and down the / valleys / of his astounding face ... I have scaled the sheer surface of his / dignities / watching the flaming horizon / with calm.

—From *American Ikon—Lincoln*, a poem by Marsden Hartley published in 1945

Between 1940 and 1942, Marsden Hartley painted three portraits of Abraham Lincoln, about whom he had also written poetry. Lincoln's facial features are recognizable in *Young Worshipper of the Truth*, yet his suit and tie are notably modern. Here, Hartley maintains the close-cropped, frontal, primitive style that characterized his portraits of other historic individuals. Lincoln held a special place in Hartley's mind as a public figure who represented honesty and strength of convictions, and this portrait aims to elevate the slain leader in collective memory.



ROBERT HENRI

Cincinnati, OH 1865–New York, NY 1929

Edith Dimock Glackens

Oil on canvas, 1902–1904

Nebraska Art Association

Gift of Alice Abel, Mr. and Mrs. Gene H. Tallman, the Abel Foundation, and Olga N. Sheldon
N-245.1970

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Robert Henri painted Edith Dimock Glackens, a fellow artist and his friend, in a full-length portrait that shows off her sumptuous dress. Glackens, her husband William, and Henri were all active as painters in New York at a time when artists, influenced by William Merritt Chase, sought to style themselves as members of the aristocracy, and not as mere craftsmen.

ROBERT HENRI

Edith Dimock Glackens



ROBERT HENRI
Cincinnati, OH 1865–New York, NY 1929

Maria y Consuelo
Oil on canvas, 1906

University of Nebraska–Lincoln
Gift of Olga N. Sheldon
U-3362.1982



ROBERT HENRI
Maria y Consuelo

Henri made numerous trips to Spain throughout his lifetime, often taking his students. He created *Maria y Consuelo* in the summer of 1906 while visiting Madrid with a group from the New York School of Art. This large painting of a young Roma woman and her child is not only a striking example of Henri's portraiture, but also a demonstration of his interest in depicting diverse sitters.



EDWARD HOPPER

Nyack, NY 1882–New York, NY 1967

Room in New York

Oil on canvas, 1932

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Anna R. and Frank M. Hall Charitable Trust

H-166.1936



EDWARD HOPPER
Room in New York

Edward Hopper's depictions of the everyday lives of city dwellers capture the anonymity and isolation of modern urban living. Some of his most compelling pictures, including *Room in New York*, are of figures seen through windows, seemingly unaware of being watched. In many paintings made between 1926 and 1932, Hopper included a single figure or couples in compositions that curator Judith Barter has described as “[evoking] a hermetically sealed world of emotion.”



ROBERT INDIANA
New Castle, IN 1928-Vinalhaven, ME 2018

The Triumph of Tira
Oil on canvas, 1960-1961

Nebraska Art Association
Nelle Cochrane Woods Memorial
N-174.1964

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ROBERT INDIANA
The Triumph of Tira

Robert Indiana's paintings are known for potent inclusion of iconographic signs and symbols. With a palette limited to four brightly contrasting colors, *The Triumph of Tira* is a striking example of Indiana's early work. It is a symbolic portrait of Mae West, star of the 1933 movie *I'm No Angel*, in which she plays Tira, a small-town lion tamer who evades a wrongful charge and ultimately finds success in New York City. The stenciled words—*law*, *cat*, *men*, and *sex*—refer to Tira's victory over the lions, police, and other men who cross her path as she strives to achieve the American dream.



WALT KUHN

New York, NY 1877-White Plains, NY 1949

Beryl

Oil on canvas, 1924

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Bequest of Mary Riepma Ross through the University of Nebraska Foundation

U-6334.2013

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WALT KUHN
Beryl

You can never find anyone like the American burlesque girl ... She is unique. She is Americana.

—Walt Kuhn in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*,
July 1, 1928

An avid promoter of early modern art, Walt Kuhn was a well-known painter, cartoonist, sculptor, printmaker, and educator. He grew up in Brooklyn and traveled to Europe in 1901 for formal art training, though he derided European art upon his return to New York and sought to define American art in the nationalist interwar period. Kuhn also directed and produced vaudeville shows and held a lifelong interest in the circus. He is probably best known for his simple and riveting portraits of showgirls and circus performers such as *Beryl*.



HUNG LIU
Changchun, China 1948-Oakland, CA 2021

Meal II
Oil on canvas, 2006

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Gift of Marjorie J. Woods in memory of Thomas C. Woods, Jr.
U-5485.2007

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HUNG LIU
Meal II

We need to remember where we come from; our history is with us and we carry it everywhere. My subjects are anonymous people—the ones who fight in the wars and provide food for us. They are not remembered for ‘making history’ as world leaders are, but to me they are the true makers of history.
—Hung Liu

Hung Liu grew up in China during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), an experience that had a lasting and profound effect on her artwork. *Meal II* presents us with a fragment of a memory conjured up from Liu’s experiences in China during her twenties. The *Meal* series from which it comes is based on photographs Liu took of farming families she had befriended during the Cultural Revolution. Here, Liu has translated one of her documentary photos to canvas, creating a diaphanous veil of fluid paint that permits hazy access to her recollections of a scene of three figures preparing to eat.



JOYCE PENSATO
New York, NY 1941-New York, NY 2019

Mr. MotoMickey
Enamel on linen on board, 2006

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Olga N. Sheldon Acquisition Trust
U-6550.2016



JOYCE PENSATO

Mr. MotoMickey

The painting was based on a rubber Mickey Mouse head someone gave me—such an unhappy-looking guy—found in a garbage dump. It looked like something out of Edvard Munch, really deep and brooding.

—Joyce Pensato

Joyce Pensato used glossy enamel paint and the visual language of abstract expressionism to create quirky, chilling interpretations of familiar cartoon characters. Her subjects included Mickey Mouse, Lisa and Homer Simpson, and Donald Duck. Pensato's gestural approach to depicting such popular icons combined with the outsized scale of the works yields an uncompromising interpretation of the dark side lurking within consumer desire.



FAIRFIELD PORTER
Winnetka, IL 1907–Southampton, NY 1975

Anne, Lizzie and Katie
Oil on canvas, 1958

Nebraska Art Association
Thomas C. Woods Memorial
N-142.1962



FAIRFIELD PORTER
Anne, Lizzie and Katie

I think that Ingres' remark that 'I leave it to time to finish my paintings' is true in a very wide and profound way. I think it's true in many ways. For instance, the paint mellows actually and so it becomes more harmonious. If it's an oil painting, there's a certain flow. There's something psychological, too, which kind of works back toward the painting. Sometimes things that are awkward and out of place, you find out, are not so awkward. They have their place, and it is an integral thing and not a scattered thing.

—Fairfield Porter

Fairfield Porter created *Anne, Lizzie and Katie* at a time of hard-won acclaim. In the 1950s, after spending two decades teaching himself to paint, he executed a number of major works, including this one, and was beginning to make a name for himself. Also a poet and art critic, Porter was one of the most rigorously intellectual American artists of the twentieth century.



NORMAN ROCKWELL
New York, NY 1894-Stockbridge, MA 1978

The County Agricultural Agent
Oil on canvas, 1947-1948

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Gift of Nathan Gold
U-563.1969



NORMAN ROCKWELL
The County Agricultural Agent

Even though Norman Rockwell appears to present a spontaneous snapshot of American agrarian life in *The County Agricultural Agent*, the painting was a carefully planned composition. Best known for his illustrations for the *Saturday Evening Post*, Rockwell worked extensively from photographs he staged in preparation for this painting. However, to create a more idyllic view of a local family's farm, he altered crucial details in his depictions of the barn and the family's clothing.



YINKA SHONIBARE CBE
born London, England 1962

The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (America)
Chromogenic print mounted on aluminum, 2006

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Robert E. Schweser and Fern Beardsley Schweser Acquisition Fund
through the University of Nebraska Foundation
U-5639.2011



FRANCISCO DE GOYA

Fuendetodos, Spain 1746-Bordeaux, France 1828

El sueño de la razón produce monstruos [The sleep of reason produces monsters]

Plate 43 from the Los Caprichos portfolio

Etching and aquatint, 1799

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Anna R. and Frank M. Hall Charitable Trust

H-678.1961



YINKA SHONIBARE CBE
The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (America)

The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (America) restages Spanish artist Francisco de Goya’s 1799 print of the same title. Goya’s print was part of the *Los Caprichos* (the follies) series that leveled critique against Enlightenment society. Like Goya, Shonibare has a few things to say about culture and politics but with a twenty-first-century perspective. Inserting African-inspired colonial-era textiles created by Europeans into Goya’s iconic Enlightenment scene, he conjures the African-European-American triangle of trade routes that created and built the New World and questions the reason behind such “progress.” Given his own transnational experience in both Nigeria and England, Shonibare invites us to consider how the complex history of globalization impacts contemporary identity.



FRANCISCO DE GOYA
El sueño de la razón produce monstruos [The sleep of reason produces monsters]



SHOSHANNA WEINBERGER
born Kingston, Jamaica 1973

Bouffant: Weighted and Balanced
Ink and gouache on paper, 2021

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Olga N. Sheldon Acquisition Trust
U-6953.2021



SHOSHANNA WEINBERGER

Bouffant: Weighted and Balanced

I consider what popular culture defines as feminine beauty to be skewed and distorted. Making connections with the awkwardness as a female growing up, trying to define myself within a context of regional, social, and cultural beauty. Reflecting on my personal issue, the media and Hollywood. I am exploring that the social norms are abnormal.

Styled with hair from my personal experience, these figures are found wearing cornrow braids, unkept locks, pressed out curls and pigtails, creating a sense of familiarity, confusion, humor and tension.

—Shoshanna Weinberger in a 2013 interview with Clelia Coussonnet



NEIL WELLIVER
Millville, PA 1929-Belfast, ME 2005

Dark Canoe
Oil on canvas, 1966

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Olga N. Sheldon Acquisition Trust and Charles W. Rain and Charlotte Rain Koch Gallery Fund
U-6799.2018

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NEIL WELLIVER
Dark Canoe

But really, my interest in painting lies in the fact of the painting. And I think that's why sometimes people find the big paintings uncomfortable. Because they, in fact, perceive the space, sense it, and at the same time are repelled by the aggression of the painting, of the pigment, of the fact of the picture, its size.
—Neil Welliver

In the early 1960s, Neil Welliver began visiting Maine where he painted large scale studies of nudes bathing in streams and ponds, as well as studies of his sons canoeing. The figures in his paintings were meant to be read as elements of nature and he sought to depict them in a way that made them one with the surrounding environment.



PHILEMONA WILLIAMSON
born New York, NY 1952

Food For Thought
Oil on linen, 2008

University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Olga N. Sheldon Acquisition Trust
U-5593.2010

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PHILEMONA WILLIAMSON
Food For Thought

Painted in saturated colors with a strong sense of line, *Food for Thought* depicts a drama occurring between two young people. Of her work in general, Philemona Williamson has said, “My paintings are of preadolescent girls and boys, children on the cusp of adulthood. The figures struggle to balance their innocence and awkwardness with their newfound sexuality. The figures are involved in their own drama when the observer discovers them; it is a surprise to both. The questions begin at this point ... Who are these children? What are they doing and why? Ethnicity and gender are questioned.”