

# Press Release

## The Brooklyn Museum Announces Complete Reinstallation of American Art Galleries, Championing a Radical New Presentation of American Art Collections

*Toward Joy: New Frameworks for American Art* opens October 4 as part of the Museum's 200th anniversary. The reinstallation experiments boldly with representation and furthers the Museum's commitment to creating a more inclusive history of art.



Laura Wheeler Waring. *Woman with Bouquet*, ca. 1940. Oil on canvas. Brooklyn Museum Fund for African American Art in honor of Teresa A. Carbone, 2016.2. © Estate of Laura Wheeler Waring. (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)

On October 4, 2024, the Brooklyn Museum will debut *Toward Joy: New Frameworks for American Art*, a transformative reinstallation of its American Art galleries and a highlight of the institution's 200th anniversary programming this fall. This collection display will bring together over 400 extraordinary artworks spanning 2,000 years—including more than 120 never-before-exhibited works. As part of the Museum's trailblazing reinterpretation of its historic collections, *Toward Joy* will foreground Black feminist approaches to inclusive space-making and institutional critique and captivate audiences with fresh experiences with art and material culture from across the Western Hemisphere. The installation is curated by Stephanie Sparling Williams, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of American Art, alongside a team of seven curators across the departments of American Art, Arts of the Americas, and Decorative Arts and Design.

"When we began thinking about the Brooklyn Museum's American Art collection in the context of today's world, we knew we needed to shake off tradition and explore

# Brooklyn Museum

alternative ways of seeing and understanding our rich holdings,” says Sparling Williams. “As an art museum, the Brooklyn Museum is a site for celebrating beauty. But what does one do when beautiful artworks are entangled in ugly and often violent histories? By prioritizing care—for our audiences and the artworks—and joy, this presentation works to radically shift how we collectively navigate and engage within these historic spaces.”

The collection will be installed across eight galleries on the Museum’s fifth floor, each dedicated to a unique curatorial framework that brings together art spanning time, culture, and media from across North, Central, and South America. The experience will begin in the elevator lobby, where Jannah and Kiyanna Handy of Brooklyn’s own BLK MKT Vintage have been tapped for the interior design.

Inspired by nineteenth- and twentieth-century Black American spirituals, the first framework, “Trouble the Water,” will explore the links between water and notions of freedom, life, and spirituality. On view will be works by Andrea Chung (born 1978), Eldzier Cortor (1916–2015), Deng Ming-Dao (born 1954), Martin Johnson Heade (1819–1904), Winslow Homer (1836–1910), Courtney M. Leonard (born 1980), and Thomas Moran (1837–1926). Sound recordings of Niagara Falls will accompany Louis Rémy Mignot’s (1831–1870) iconic painting *Niagara* (1866).

Rooted in African diasporic and Indigenous ways of seeing and being, the next framework, “Radical Care,” explores modes of curatorial care—for artworks, belongings, and people. The Museum’s iconic painting of Mount Rosalie by Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902) will be installed in this gallery, alongside the Hodinöhsö:ni’ (Haudenosaunee) Thanksgiving Address and art by Grafton Tyler Brown (1841–1918), Beverly Buchanan (1940–2015), Hayden Haynes (born 1983) and Samantha Jacobs (born 1983), Lilly Martin Spencer (1822–1902), and Chiura Obata (1885–1975). At the heart of this gallery is the American Art Study. Part library, part laboratory, the Study is a space to examine how these concepts animate the objects and histories of the Americas. “By reframing the collection within different histories and traditions than is typical in museums, the Study reorients and ‘shows’ our curatorial work,” says Sparling Williams. “Through this space, we place the ongoing project of learning—and unlearning—at the center of the conversation, as we aim to link this work with larger political struggles for more just futures.”

Meditating on the Black vernacular adage “to give someone their flowers”—to honor and appreciate them—the framework “To Give Flowers” highlights trailblazers who have charted oft-overlooked paths of creative expression, including Lois Mailou Jones (1905–1998), whose early twentieth-century floral-patterned wallpaper adorns the gallery’s walls. Artworks include American paintings and decorative arts from the eighteenth through twenty-first centuries, as well as Indigenous American pottery and beadwork. The interpretation for this framework was developed in partnership with staff from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

“Counterparts” was inspired by the 1965 exhibition *First Group Showing: Works in Black & White*, mounted by the Black arts collective Spiral, and by *The Black & White Show*, curated by Black feminist conceptual artist Lorraine O’Grady in 1983. By presenting only works with a black and/or white palette, the framework brings together objects and belongings typically segregated by time, culture, and medium. Wide-ranging pieces by over eighty artists, including Josef Albers (1888–1976), Chakaia Booker (born 1952), Emil Fuchs (1866–1929), Malvina Hoffman (1885–1966), Martin Lewis (1881–1962), Hiram Powers (1805–1873), Fritz Scholder (1937–2005), Merton Simpson (1928–2013), and Sandra Victorino (born 1956) will be displayed to dramatic effect.

In a time of heightened visibility and contentious control for human bodies, “Surface Tension” celebrates the nude figure. The framework will revisit and complicate historical themes surrounding the nude in European-American visual culture through the lenses of cultural difference, sex work, and sex and body positivity. On view will be a wide range of works on paper, sculpture, paintings, and photography by Laura Aguilar (1959–2018), William James Glackens (1870–1938), Sasha Gordon (born 1998), Eastman Johnson (1824–1906), John Koch (1909–1978), Senga Nengudi (born 1943), Sarah Paxton Ball Dodson (1847–1906), and Beatrice Wood (1893–1998). Through an in-gallery kiosk, visitors can sketch a nearby artwork or a friend striking a pose, participating in the long-standing traditions of modeling and sketching.

“Several Seats”—inspired by the Black and Latinx drag-ball expression “have several seats”—will feature historical seated portraits hung below the sightline, critiquing traditional narratives that privilege white, wealthy individuals. New York City–based drag and ballroom artists were invited to read, or spill the “T,” on these paintings in the form of artwork labels. The portraits include works by Cecilia Beaux (1855–1942), Miguel Cabrera (1695–1768), William Merritt Chase (1849–1916), Joshua Johnson (ca. 1763–after 1825), and Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827). Other highlights designed to inspire wonder and encourage playful engagement include a striking wall of chairs selected from the Museum’s decorative arts collection, a fashion runway, and refurbished New York City park bench seating. With their long history as resting places and makeshift homes, these park benches underscore the gallery’s exploration of inclusion and exclusion, revealing the hierarchies and power dynamics embedded in public spaces.

“A Quiet Place” explores how diverse American artists have sought quietude through their art, and the gallery itself is designed for reflection and rest. Audiences will have the opportunity to gaze into a dazzling Alma W. Thomas (1891–1978) painting while being guided through a series of rest- and liberation-centered affirmations in an audio spotlight by Tricia Hersey (born 1974); to sit atop a luminous, richly colored rug, designed in the early twentieth century by Anna Russell Jones (1902–1995) and reproduced for this context. Other artworks include a nineteenth-century Očhéthi Šakówiŋ cradleboard, a Gee’s Bend quilt by Lucy T. Pettway (1921–2004), an impressive nineteenth-century Herter Brothers mantelpiece, and paintings by Thomas Cole (1801–1848), Asher B. Durand (1796–1886), John Frederick Kensett (1816–1872), Richard Mayhew (born 1924), and David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974).

The final framework, “Witness,” will feature an impressive salon hang that boasts the breadth and depth of the Museum’s portrait holdings. The portrait subjects will formally bear witness to the movements of the Museum’s visitors and the work of our time, which includes creative enactments, teaching, and learning, as well as civic engagement and community service. Artworks include Gwa’sala Kwakwaka’wakw potlatch figures, self-portraits by James Luna (1950–2018), a quilt depicting Shirley Chisholm by Bisa Butler (born 1973), and paintings by Kyohei Inukai (1886–1954), Lois Mailou Jones (1905–1998), Ammi Phillips (1788–1865), and Faith Ringgold (1930–2024). An interactive stage will serve as a venue for witnessing live performances and support the Museum’s public programs and teaching.

The American Art department’s curatorial process unfolded through collaboration and was supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Terra Foundation for American Art, the Brooklyn Museum’s Council for African American Art, and several key individuals. Through work with an Advisory Committee, monthly Black Feminist Roundtable conversations, biweekly team workshops spanning many of the Museum’s departments, and hundreds of discussions, the department sought to speak creatively

and boldly to the many cultures and communities that the Museum serves. Building on the rich contributions of BIPOC thinkers and cultural producers, the framework model offers a way to experiment with representation in the galleries, to explore innovative curatorial ideas and actions, and to systematically center more diverse voices and perspectives.

*Toward Joy: New Frameworks for American Art* is organized by Stephanie Sparling Williams, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of American Art; Caroline Gillaspie, Assistant Curator of American Art; Catherine Futter, Senior Curator, Decorative Arts; Liz St. George, Assistant Curator, Decorative Arts; Nancy Rosoff, Andrew W. Mellon Senior Curator, Arts of the Americas; Dare Turner, Curator of Indigenous Art; with Grace Billingslea and Michael Gibson-Prugh, Curatorial Assistants, Arts of the Americas and Europe.

This exhibition is made possible through support from the



Leadership support for this exhibition is provided by Tracey and Phillip Riese. Major support is provided by American International Group, Inc.; Sandra Williams-Cornwell and W. Don Cornwell; Pfizer, Inc.; and the Council for African American Art. Generous support is provided by Lizanne Fontaine and Robert Buckholz, the Hasso Philanthropic Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and Nkonye Okoh.