The Brooklyn Museum Grows Collection with Numerous Gifts and Significant New Acquisitions

Highlights include a monumental painting by Cecily Brown; works by Mel Chin, Simone Leigh, and Hank Willis Thomas; and several important additions that enrich the Museum’s Native American, Korean, African, and Egyptian holdings, as well as the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art collection.

The Brooklyn Museum announces more than 150 major new acquisitions across departments, furthering the institution’s commitment to building a cohesive and inclusive collection that attempts to tell honest stories about our past and present. These artworks entered the collection over the past year and include a range of artists who are new to the Museum’s collection, such as Cecily Brown, Mel Chin, Darrel Ellis, Simone Leigh, Tourmaline, Gail Tremblay, and Bill Viola, and span a wide range of mediums, styles, and cultures.

Anne Pasternak, Shelby White and Leon Levy Director, Brooklyn Museum, says, “We are grateful for the generosity of our benefactors who believe in the Brooklyn Museum and join us in our passionate belief that our audiences deserve great art that teaches, inspires, and ignites joy. It’s an honor to have these extraordinary additions to our collection, and we can’t wait to share them with our visitors.”

Contemporary highlights include a monumental oil painting by British painter Cecily Brown, a purchase gift made possible by Barbara and John Vogelstein; an installation of the long-running environmental justice project Fundred Reserve by Mel Chin; two photographs by innovative mixed-media artist Darrel Ellis; a major stoneware, cement, and sound installation by Simone Leigh; a vase by leading ceramic artist Roberto Lugo; and an exceptional object by contemporary Native American artist Gail Tremblay (Mi’kmaq-Onondaga). The Museum is also thrilled to officially welcome two artworks into the collection that are familiar to visitors: Hank Willis Thomas’s site-specific neon sculpture LOVE RULES, situated in the Museum lobby, and Deborah Kass’s OY/YO sculpture, located on the Museum plaza. Other acquisition highlights include a video work by Bill Viola; six paintings by Theresa Bernstein, the first paintings by the artist to enter the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art; and works by Ranti Bam and Taiye Idahor, the first contemporary works by Nigerian women artists to enter the collection. Works by contemporary artists Derek Fordjour, Eric N. Mack, Sable Elyse Smith, Tourmaline, and Sasha Wortzel also joined the collection. Some of these works are currently on view at the Museum, including those by Ranti Bam, Cecily Brown, Taiye Idahor, Sable Elyse Smith, Gail Tremblay, and Sasha Wortzel.
Historical works include a superior quality addition of a talatat relief block, which adjoins two existing reliefs in the Museum’s ancient Egyptian collection galleries, illustrating a complete three-block ritual scene not seen together since antiquity; and six sets of rare ceramic epitaph plaques (circa 1480–1682) from Korea, gifted by the Carroll Family Collection, making the collection of these important documents the largest outside of Korea.

Highlights include:

*The Triumph of the Vanities II (2018)* by Cecily Brown, gifted by Barbara and John Vogelstein

This monumental painting is the first major work by Cecily Brown to enter the Museum’s collection. The artwork is the result of an invitation from the Metropolitan Opera to create two paintings for the main hall of the opera house. The enormous oil painting on linen is executed in a loose, gestural style that is Brown’s trademark; the semiabstract painting depicts fragmentary figures in a festive crowd, a scene mirroring the social interplay at the opera in New York City. Combining inspiration from her close study of artists such as Rubens, Delacroix, and Degas, Brown envisions a scene that is a fusion of Max Beckmann’s *Paris Society*, which depicts a cocktail party at the German Embassy, in Paris, in the early 1930s, and Florine Stettheimer’s paintings of New York’s avant-garde gatherings of the 1920s through 1940s. Brown has noted that the scene also addresses the contentious history of the construction of Lincoln Center, which involved the demolition of many homes and businesses on Manhattan’s West Side, in the late 1950s, under the direction of Robert Moses.

*Loophole of Retreat (2019)* by Simone Leigh

This important installation by Simone Leigh, one of the most significant mid-career artists working today, was initially presented in 2019 at the Guggenheim Museum on the occasion of Leigh’s winning the 2018 Hugo Boss Prize. This is the first artwork by Leigh to enter the Museum’s collection, and is a collaboration with the sound artist Moor Mother. Leigh has mined the Black female experience throughout her artistic career; this project draws inspiration from the eponymous chapter in the autobiography of American abolitionist Harriet Jacobs, which recounted her journey to freedom, including the harrowing experience of hiding from her enslaver in a crawl space for seven years. The sound element featured in the work samples recordings of men protesting inhumane conditions in a Brooklyn prison in 2019.
This is the first work by social practice pioneer Mel Chin to enter the collection. *Fundred Reserve* (2008–19) is one of Chin’s most intensive environmental projects, raising awareness of the impact of lead in soil throughout the United States. The project was created after Chin’s 2006 visit to New Orleans, following Hurricane Katrina, where he learned about the city’s large-scale lead contamination problem. Chin created the *Fundred Reserve* to amplify the voices of individuals, particularly children, in a collective response to the catastrophe. Each person was invited to color in enlarged imitations of hundred dollar bills or “fundred.” The bills were then collected and delivered to members of Congress to demonstrate not only the financial resources needed to solve the problem but also the value of a lead-free future.

Two photographs (1990) by Darrel Ellis, with leadership support for the acquisitions provided by the Charina Endowment Fund

Since Darrell Ellis passed away from AIDS-related complications in 1992, his estate has not shown or given access to his work for nearly two decades, making this acquisition a significant addition by an important yet overlooked artist whose prescient works from the late 1970s to the early 1990s explore the Black family, the legacy of police violence, queer identity, and AIDS. Entering the collection are two works from a series in which Ellis
appropriated and manipulated photographic negatives made by his father, Thomas Ellis, who was a professional photographer and was killed by the police shortly before Darrel was born.

_When Ice Stretched on for Miles (2017) by Gail Tremblay_

This exceptional piece by contemporary Native American artist Gail Tremblay is her first work to enter the Museum collection. A renowned Onondaga-Mi'kmaq poet and visual artist, Tremblay applies a combination of traditional methods and contemporary critique to her work, which is centered on environmental justice and the appropriation and misrepresentation of Native people. This work is a strong example of her highly regarded film baskets that address the devastating impact of climate change on Inuit communities. Tremblay began making film baskets in the 1980s and was the first Native American artist to weave baskets from unconventional materials. Although this work looks like a mid-nineteenth-century basket, it was woven using 16mm film instead of traditional materials, such as ash or sweetgrass.
Roberto Lugo’s *Brooklyn Century Vase* (2019) revisits and transforms one of the Museum’s most iconic traditional decorative arts objects, Karl Mueller’s *Century Vase* (1876). Lugo, one of the country’s leading artists working in clay, is also a social activist, spoken word poet, and educator, who juxtaposes classical ceramics with modern critiques of racism, contemporary politics, and American history. His *Century Vase* series investigates American identity through the form and iconography of Mueller’s nineteenth-century *Century Vase* that was created to celebrate American achievement and greatness. In *Brooklyn Century Vase*, Lugo portrays the influence that Brooklyn has had on American culture, from Jackie Robinson playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers to the Notorious B.I.G.’s contributions to hip-hop.

*Talatat Relief Block (circa 1353–1323 B.C.E.)*

This talatat relief block (circa 1353–1323 B.C.E.) adjoins two existing reliefs in the Museum collection, along with a generous loan from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, to reveal a decorative wall depicting a pastoral scene typical of the Amarna period, seen for the first time together since antiquity. This period of Egyptian history was as interesting as it was brief.
because of the unprecedented overhaul of the country’s religion, as well as the relocation and quick construction of the capital by pharaoh Akhenaten. The blocks were separated in antiquity and have only been recognized to align with each other within the last year.

**Blue Horn (2017) by Derek Fordjour, gifted by Tiffany Hott**

![Blue Horn (2017) by Derek Fordjour, gifted by Tiffany Hott](image)

Derek Fordjour, an artist of Ghanaian descent whose collage-based approach is a valuable addition to the Museum’s contemporary collection, creates works that span painting, sculpture, collage, and installation, exploring themes of race and inequality through the visual tropes of the circus, the carnival, and communal games of leisure, play, and curiosity. Fordjour’s subjects often relate to his own childhood memories, as well as broader concepts of collectivity and reward.

**...three kings weep... (2018) by Ebony G. Patterson, gifted by the Contemporary Art Committee and purchase gift of Carla Chammas and Jodi Roaman**

![...three kings weep... (2018) by Ebony G. Patterson, gifted by the Contemporary Art Committee and purchase gift of Carla Chammas and Jodi Roaman](image)

Ebony G. Patterson uses lush patterning and vibrant color to entice viewers to contemplate the power of beauty and fashion as well as historical and contemporary violence against Black people. In this floor-to-ceiling video projection, a trio of Black men silently shed tears as they sit before a floral backdrop. Three videos play backward, and as a result, the initially
shirtless men appear to be slowly dressing themselves in colorful clothing with mixed patterns and gleaming jewelry that draws on the styles of dancehall culture and carnival dress. Their silence is punctuated by the voice of a boy reciting "If We Must Die," a sonnet that Jamaican-born writer Claude McKay published in 1919 after a summer of intense racial terror and resistance across the United States.

Important additions to the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art: Harmony Hammond, Tourmaline, Theresa Bernstein, Sable Elyse Smith, and Sasha Wortzel

_Hunkertime_ (1979–80) by Harmony Hammond, gifted by Elizabeth A. Sackler

_Gifted by Elizabeth A. Sackler in honor of Catherine Morris, Sackler Senior Curator, Hunkertime (1979–80) is an iconic example of Harmony Hammond’s exploration of materials and the visual language of bodies, gender, and lesbian identity. In this large-scale sculptural installation, Hammond wraps nine abstract forms using textiles and latex rubber, adorning some with ruffled folds. The off-kilter arrangement evokes bodies as well as community through a feminist and genderqueer idiom—a powerful departure from the sleek, austere, and masculine vocabulary of Minimalism from that period. The sculpture and its title call to mind a community of collective support, much like the kind Hammond helped to form at the start of her career through A.I.R. Gallery, the journal *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*, and organization of the exemplary 1978 exhibition *A Lesbian Show.*
Tourmaline is an activist, filmmaker, and writer who, in recent years, has been recognized—most notably as one of *Time*’s 100 Most Influential People of 2020—for her work in uncovering and honoring under-known stories of transgender individuals whose legacies impact our world and futures. *Salacia* (2019) was commissioned as part of the exhibition *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall*, making it possible for Tourmaline to shoot the piece on film rather than digitally. A meditation on the intergenerational trauma of displacement, *Salacia* follows Mary Jones, a Black trans woman and sex worker who lived in New York in the 1830s, as she navigates brutal systems of racism and transphobia, including her incarceration at Castle Williams, located on present-day Governors Island. Also incorporating footage of trans activist Sylvia Rivera from 1995, the work connects the past to the present, and self-knowledge to power, in fantastical, richly detailed scenes.

**Six paintings (1911–80) by Theresa Bernstein, gifted by Edith and Martin Stein**

These paintings significantly deepen the Museum’s holdings of artwork by Theresa Bernstein, whose work portrays a narrative central to the values of the Brooklyn Museum and the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. Her energetic depictions of New York City, including many of its famous cultural landmarks, chronicle the emergence of the modern city, while her representation of women as subjects rather than objects marks a compelling shift from traditional portrayals of women over the course of the twentieth century. Bernstein lived to the age of 111, and she emerged as an artist early in the twentieth century as part of a generation of women artists whose talents and accomplishments were largely overshadowed and ignored by their male counterparts, and by society. Her skill as a painter combined with a sensitive acuity for representing cultural moments offer an important window into political and social concerns that continue to resonate a century later.
Two works by Sable Elyse Smith, gifted by the Lumpkin-Boccuzzi Family Collection and Isaac Joseph

Sable Elyse Smith is an important artist and writer among a vanguard of queer artists of color working in New York City. Smith’s work draws attention to the impact of racialized, systemic violence on individuals and communities in the United States. *How We Tell Stories to Children* (2015), gifted by Isaac Joseph, is an important addition to the Sackler Center and stands out in Smith’s oeuvre for its intimate content. The single-channel work combines found footage, music clips, and audio of the artist reading, as well as video footage of her father recorded while incarcerated. *Visiting* (2017), gifted by the Lumpkin-Boccuzzi Family Collection, is emblematic of Smith’s text-based work. The work lists regulatory instructions for visitors to prisons, mixing official rules with the ordinary violence that these processes of control and surveillance inflict on individuals visiting family and loved ones.

Two works by Sasha Wortzel (2019), gifted by the artist

*This is an Address I* (2019) and *This is an Address II* (2019) are new works by filmmaker Sasha Wortzel, an important figure in the new wave of emerging queer artists, whose work has won multiple awards and received critical praise. These video works were presented publicly for the first time in the Museum’s critically lauded exhibition *Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall*. The videos focus on conditions of material scarcity, gentrification, and systemic marginalization within LGBTQ+ communities on the Hudson River piers and in the surrounding meatpacking district, ruminating on all that has been lost.
Gifts from Arthur and Carol Goldberg, including Raymond Pettibon, Bill Viola, and William Kentridge

Three drawings (1987–89) by Raymond Pettibon

Raymond Pettibon is one of the leading American artists working with drawing, text, and artist books, garnering a cult following for his early work in the Los Angeles punk rock scene. These expressive works are exemplary pen-and-ink drawings that combine image and text to represent various themes of American sociopolitical culture, with an emphasis on war and nationalism.

Anima (2000) by Bill Viola

This is the first work by pioneering video artist Bill Viola to enter the Museum’s collection. Since the early 1970s, Viola has been considered as one of America’s leading contemporary artists, celebrated for his work in new media. Anima (2000) is a three-channel video, presented in a triptych format, which references the formal qualities of traditional Renaissance portraiture. The panels depict three people against neutral backgrounds, who express joy, sorrow, anger, and fear, in that order, in extreme slow motion. The video slows the physical movement of the figures so much that the panels resemble photographs that, upon first glance, hauntingly reveal themselves as moving images over the course of eighty-two minutes.

Four Soho Eckstein films (1989–91) by William Kentridge

These four films by renowned South African artist William Kentridge are the first major works by the artist to enter the collection, and are significant additions to the Museum’s growing collection of moving-image works. The films are part of Kentridge’s series 9 Drawings for Projection (2005), which includes nine short animated films made between 1989 and 2003. The films comprise moving images made from a single drawing that is augmented gradually to offer a commentary on South Africa’s apartheid system, portrayed through the life of Soho Eckstein, a fictional white mining tycoon in South Africa.
Important additions from recent exhibitions: Ming Smith, Elle Pérez, and Liz Johnson Artur, supported by the Contemporary Art Committee

*Untitled (Self-Portrait with Camera), New York, NY (circa 1975)* by Ming Smith

In 1972, early in her career as a photographer, Ming Smith was invited to join Kamoinge, an association of Black photographers formed in 1963, to produce images of empowerment to counteract negative portrayals of Black people during the struggle for civil rights. Smith’s contributions to the group include portraits of avant-garde composer-performers Grace Jones and Sun Ra, in which indistinct focus lends an enigmatic mystery and a sense of immediacy. Her long-term interest in self-portraiture is exemplified in this *Untitled* (circa 1975) photograph, which was exhibited in *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965–85*. Smith’s work was also featured in *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power.*

*Untitled (Kirsten) (2015)* by Elle Pérez

Elle Pérez’s ongoing, ten-year project in black-and-white photography is represented by a singular photograph titled *Untitled (Kirsten) (2015)*. The sequence of photographs shows an array of moments and locations, including local feast day festivities for patron saints in Puerto Rico; underground wrestling rings and punk nights in the Bronx; and queer dance clubs in the Bronx, New Haven, and Baltimore. For Pérez, these community sites provide a backdrop for a detailed view into how people transform their daily aesthetics to reflect their
sense of self. Pérez’s work was featured in-depth in the Museum’s exhibition Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall, as well as in the 2019 Whitney Biennial and a 2018 solo exhibition at MoMA PS1, among many other presentations.

AfroRussia (2010–19) by Liz Johnson Artur

Liz Johnson Artur’s video work AfroRussia (2010–19), which she completed for her 2019 solo exhibition at the Museum, documents the stories of Russians of African and Caribbean descent. After connecting with her Ghanaian father for the first time in 2010, the London-based artist traveled to Russia “to hear stories in Russian by Russians who look like me,” she says. Like Johnson Artur, many were born to Russian mothers and African or Caribbean fathers who studied in Eastern Europe as part of the Soviet Union’s efforts to expand its influence during the Cold War. Growing tensions between the foreign students and white Soviets resulted in violence and protests in the Soviet Union and several Eastern Bloc countries; many of the students were given exit visas after graduating, although some had already formed relationships and had children. After meeting and filming numerous subjects, Johnson Artur says, “We all agreed that we felt Russian as well as African.”

Seat Pleasant (2019) by Eric N. Mack, gifted by the artist

Eric N. Mack is best known for his work at the intersection of fashion and art. Seat Pleasant (2019) is a site-specific textile painting and one of his largest works. Completed at the Museum, the work was featured in the exhibition Eric N. Mack: Lemme walk across the room. Consisting of two intersecting, suspended pieces of fabric screen printed with dye,
Mack’s work explores the sculptural potential of a painting, while encouraging visitors to encounter it by walking alongside it. Continuing the legacy of innovative artists like Sam Gilliam, who made the radical gesture of draping and suspending the canvas rather than stretching it on wooden bar frames, Mack further extends the painting, bringing it closer to the experience of everyday life, by using material primarily intended for clothing.

**Important additions of contemporary works by Nigerian artists: Adewunmi (2018) by Taiye Idahor and Antafi (2019) by Ranti Bam**

These two works are the first contemporary artworks by Nigerian women artists to enter the Museum’s collection, significantly augmenting the holdings by contemporary artists from Africa and complementing the regional strengths of historical works in the Arts of Africa collection. Lagos-based artist Taiye Idahor creates sculptural collages that play with themes of history, gender, and globalization through a Nigerian lens. Adewunmi (2018) is an excellent example of Idahor’s complex art practice, which combines sculpture, photography, collage, and drawing. She photographs women adorned with plastic versions of thick, netted coral beads historically worn by female royalty of the kingdom of Benin (1180–1897), but now considered standard wedding finery, and digitally alters the image to crop out the woman. The resulting depiction of an absent woman suggests norms of femininity that Nigerian women may be expected to fit into.

An important emerging ceramicist, London- and Lagos-based Ranti Bam has exhibited in the United States, the UK, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Senegal. Antafi (2019) is a handmade, slab-built terracotta cylindrical vessel with a textured, swirling pattern of white, pink, and red glaze. The seams of the slabs are visible, with several overlaid clay patches bonding the pieces together, juxtaposing the vessel’s fragility with its seemingly sturdy form. Bam’s technique reflects her UK ceramics training, as well as her interest in handmade ceramic techniques from across Africa. This is Bam’s first work to be acquired by an American museum.
Ink Rock by Zhang Jian-Jun (2019), gifted by the Reverie Collection

This unique sculptural work created specifically for the Arts of China galleries is by one of China’s most important living artists. Zhang Jian-Jun’s sculpture takes the form of a traditional Chinese scholar's rock or garden rock, which are naturally formed limestone pieces found near Lake Taihu in eastern China. Scholar's rocks have been prized by artists, poets, and Confucian scholars for their elaborately eroded forms, their ability to evoke meditative landscapes, and their representation of a microcosm of the universe. This is the first scholar's rock to enter the Museum’s collection.

Six sets of rare ceramic epitaph plaques (1480–1682), gifted by the Carroll Family Collection

The addition of these rare pieces makes the Brooklyn Museum home to the largest collection of epitaph plaques outside of Korea, bolstering the Museum’s reputation as one of the world’s foremost repositories of Korean art. Epitaph plaques are quintessentially Korean objects, invented to provide a durable means of recording the biographies of noted individuals after their passing. Composed in Chinese characters in underglaze pigments on white clay, these objects offer rare examples of dated ceramics and are often the sole source of information about historical individuals. They are highly prized in Korea and are displayed as highlights in Korean art and history museums.

Both works, which are by Brooklyn-based conceptual artists, currently greet passersby and welcome visitors to the Museum. Hank Willis Thomas—whose work focuses on themes of identity, the media, and popular culture—poetically affirms the importance of love and compassion amid the violence of our challenging times in his site-specific neon sculpture LOVE RULES (2018).

Deborah Kass frequently gives her own spin to signature imagery by twentieth-century male artists, such as Milton Glaser and Robert Indiana. Her vibrant yellow OY/YO (2015) sculpture seeks to evoke joy and unity in its playful monumentalizing of classic New York slang that is also the Spanish pronoun for “I” and a common Yiddish word.

Illustrated, from top:


Gail E. Tremblay (Onondaga-Mi'kmaq, born 1945). *When Ice Stretched on for Miles*, 2017. 16mm film, white film leader, gold and silver braided plastic thread, 16 × 9 × 9 in. (40.6 × 22.9 × 22.9 cm). Brooklyn Museum; H. Randolph Lever Fund, 2019.41a–b. © Gail Tremblay


Derek Fordjour (American, born 1974). *Blue Horn*, 2017. Oil pastel, charcoal, acrylic, cardboard, and carved newspaper, mounted on canvas, 60 × 40 in. (152.4 × 101.6 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Gift of Tiffany Hott, 2019.31. © Derek Fordjour. (Photo: courtesy of the artist)


Harmony Hammond (American, born 1944). *Hunkertime*, 1980. Cloth, wood, acrylic, gesso, latex rubber, Rhoplex, and metal, 83 × 286 in. (210.8 × 726.4 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Gift of Elizabeth A. Sackler in honor of Catherine Morris, Senior Sackler Curator, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, 2019.23a–i. © 2020 Harmony Hammond / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY


Sasha Wortzel (American, born 1983). *This is an Address I and This is an Address II*, 2019. Video (color, sound): (a): 17 min., 12 sec., (b): 9 min., 3 sec. Brooklyn Museum; Gift of the artist with support from the Mary Smith Dorward Fund. © Sasha Wortzel


*Epitaph Plaques for Yi Ha-Jin*, circa 1682. Glazed ceramic, incised and decorated with underglaze iron red, 7 3/16 × 5 11/16 in. (18.3 × 14.5 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Gift of the Carroll Family Collection, 2019.42.6a–f