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High Museum of Art to Host Third Annual Collectors Evening to Help Build Permanent Collection

New Acquisition to be Chosen among Seven Proposed Works from Each of the High's Curatorial Departments

ATLANTA, December 21, 2011 – The High Museum of Art will host the third annual Collectors Evening on January 20, 2012. Created with the single goal of building the Museum's permanent collection, the event will showcase the High's curators as they each present a work of art that they wish to have added to the High's collection. With seven works proposed for acquisition, guests will cast their ballots in four rounds and the High will purchase the works of art that receive the most votes, via funds raised for the evening. The event is open to the general public; tickets and more information, including curator videos, are available online at www.High.org/CollectorsEvening. To view the objects and related videos click on "Browse Proposed Acquisitions and Curator Videos."

"We are thrilled that Collectors Evening has created such exciting momentum among our curators and patrons in selecting the next works of art to join the collection," said David Brenneman, the High's Director of Collections and Exhibitions and Frances B. Bunzl Family Curator of European Art. "Fun and in the best of competitive spirits, this has become a special opportunity to spotlight the Museum's curators and their visions for the High. This event plays a unique and exciting role in adding to the now more than 12,000 works of art in the High's collection."

Since its inception in 2010, Collectors Evening participants have selected a total of eight acquisitions for the Museum, including a collection of 20 photographs by Paul Fusco from the "Robert F. Kennedy Funeral Train Rediscovered" portfolio; the painting "Thiago Oliveira do Rosario Rozendo" from Kehinde Wiley's series "The World Stage: Brazil"; an African "Ntadi" sculpture; a round-back chair and table from the "Sketch Furniture" series, by Sweden's Front Design; the painting "Portrait of Nancy Destouches," by Auguste-Jean-Baptiste; "Leda and the Swan," a photograph from Vik Muniz's "Pictures of Junk" series; the fluorescent light sculpture "Bright Star," by Spencer Finch; and the African "Elephant Headdress" from a Bamileke artist.

This year's proposed acquisitions include the following:

African Art

The proposed work of art from the African art department is a "Mami Wata figure." This is among the most impressive sculptures ever made honoring Mami Wata—pidgin English for "Mother

of Water”—an auspicious being of great spiritual power celebrated throughout Africa and the African Diaspora. Mami Wata is most often associated with the sacred healing power of water and with love, wealth and good fortune. She is represented by a mermaid or sometimes appears as a woman with snakes around her shoulders and encircling her body. Her serpent imagery is, in part, inspired by a photograph of a snake charmer taken in Hamburg, Germany, in 1887—an image that was subsequently turned into a circus poster. The poster was made into a popular chromolithograph that has circulated widely ever since, including throughout West Africa. This sculpture is directly inspired by the imagery of the chromolithograph, which to this day often serves as the central image in shrines devoted to Mami Wata all across the Black Atlantic world, from Nigeria to Haiti and beyond.

American Art

Norman Wilfred Lewis’s oil on canvas “Torch” is the proposed acquisition for the American art collection. Born in 1909 of Bermudan immigrants in New York, Norman Lewis grew up a child of the Harlem Renaissance. Though always engaged with themes relating to social justice and racial equality in his work, Lewis turned to a more abstract, personal expression in the mid-1940s after joining Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning—the group of downtown artist who would become the Abstract Expressionists. In 1951 Lewis’s work was included alongside that of his Ab Ex colleagues in the seminal exhibition “Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America,” held at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. “Torch,” which Lewis painted in 1960 for friends as a wedding gift, shows a scene familiar in Harlem: people gathered around a Sunday stump, with a speaker preaching on the city streets. The atmosphere appears to light up with the rhetoric of the fire-and-brimstone sermon that bellows through the crowds. Although Lewis offers few details, the painting’s title suggests ignition, flame or a guiding light. “Torch” would be the first work by this important mid-century artist to enter the High’s collection and would be a landmark addition to its growing collection of work by prominent African American artists.

Decorative Arts and Design

Marcel Wanders’s “Crochet Chair” is the proposed acquisition for the High’s decorative arts and design collection. A modern, airy and surprisingly weight-bearing form made from a simple hand-crocheted fiber, “Crochet Chair” blurs the boundaries between craft and design. A playful twist on the traditional lace doily, Wanders transforms the conventional openwork textile from a decorative yet protective shield of furnishings into the form of the chair itself. Using epoxy resin and a mold to create a hard fabric skin or shell, this prototype was the genesis of a limited-edition series of 20. One of the first designers involved with the innovative Dutch design collective Droog and co-founder of Moooi, Wanders is an important international contemporary designer whose works continue to delight and inspire.

European Art

The European art department will propose “A Seated Bassett Hound” by Constant Troyon, one of the leading painters of the Barbizon School, a group of French artists who painted in and around the forest of Fontainebleau. Troyon visited Holland in 1847. That trip proved to be a pivotal moment in his career. There he discovered the works of the Dutch animal painters peculiar to that region and, after returning to France, he devoted the remainder of his life producing some of the finest animal paintings of the nineteenth century. This charming, almost life-size painting of a basset hound is clearly a portrait of someone’s beloved canine companion.

The dog is seated and at attention, awaiting its master's command. The High's collection contains a number of paintings showing dogs but this would be the first true portrait of a dog to be acquired. It would also be the first work by Troyon to enter the collection, where it would join works by other Barbizon artists, including Corot, Rousseau and Barye, whose landscape from the forest of Fontainebleau was recently purchased by the High at auction.

Folk Art

Martin Ramirez's "Untitled (Caballero with Red and Blue Patterns)" will be presented by the folk art department. Born in the Mexican state of Jalisco, Martin Ramirez created in his drawings a personal world in which his culture and experiences were transformed into a rich collection of symbols, including trains, caballeros, animals and the Madonna—all visual reflections of his interior life. Ramirez made his art while institutionalized, using any available materials he could find, joining smaller sheets of paper together with a paste made from saliva and food starch. Decades after his death, he has emerged as one of the most highly regarded self-taught artists of the 20th century. Ramirez was the subject of two critically lauded and enormously popular exhibitions at New York's American Folk Art Museum, in 2007 and 2009, respectively. This vigorous and expressive drawing of a caballero, perhaps the figure most immediately associated with the artist, will complement the "Madonna of the Immaculate Conception" already in the High's collection, adding some depth to its holdings of this important self-taught artist.

Modern and Contemporary Art

The modern and contemporary art department will propose "Down Time," an acrylic on canvas by KAWS. KAWS is a pseudonym of Brian Donnelly, who was first recognized in the early 1990s in New York City in connection with graffiti art and quickly became associated with ambitious murals that subverted public advertisements. "Down Time" is an expression used to describe personal or recreational time spent away from daily cares and responsibilities. Here it also suggests a word play that refers to the gravitational downward pull of the painting's imagery. The face of KAWSBOB—one of KAWS's cast of cartoonish characters—is barely discernable through the disorderly tumbling of rectangular forms. KAWS has recently had solo exhibitions at The Aldrich Museum, Galerie Perrotin in Paris and Galeria Javier Lopez in Madrid. He has an upcoming solo exhibition at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

Photography

Hiroshi Sugimoto's "Lightning Fields" will be proposed by the photography department. Sugimoto is known for his elegant photographic series depicting subjects as diverse as seascapes, movie theaters and natural history dioramas. Widely admired as a master printer and one of the most important figures in contemporary photography, his work is held in museums worldwide. In recent years, Sugimoto has been experimenting with the application of electricity directly to unexposed film, creating images that are entirely photographic but made without the use of a camera and lens. After months of honing his technique with electrostatic currents in the darkroom, his forays have yielded a stunning series of prints, which he calls "Lightning Field" pictures. The photographs are mesmerizing and rich in tonality, their electric shapes utterly abstract while simultaneously resembling the basic structures upon which natural forms are built. In "Lightning Fields 182," the visual trace of an electrical charge measuring more than 400,000 volts sweeps across the composition from bottom right to upper left, reading in turns like the textures of a human hand, the upward-reaching leaves of a fern and the stark branches of a tree.

High Museum of Art

The High Museum of Art, founded in 1905 as the Atlanta Art Association, is the leading art museum in the southeastern United States. With more than 12,000 works of art in its permanent collection, the High Museum of Art has an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American and decorative art; significant holdings of European paintings; a growing collection of African American art; and burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, photography and African art. The High is also dedicated to supporting and collecting works by Southern artists and is distinguished as the only major museum in North America to have a curatorial department specifically devoted to the field of folk and self-taught art. The High's media arts department produces acclaimed annual film series and festivals of foreign, independent and classic cinema. In November 2005, the High opened three new buildings by architect Renzo Piano that more than doubled the Museum's size, creating a vibrant "village for the arts" at the Woodruff Arts Center in Midtown Atlanta. For more information about the High, please visit www.high.org.

The Woodruff Arts Center

The Woodruff Arts Center is ranked among the top four arts centers in the nation. The Woodruff is unique in that it combines four visual and performing arts divisions on one campus as one not-for-profit organization. Opened in 1968, the Woodruff Arts Center is home to the Alliance Theatre, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the High Museum of Art and Young Audiences. To learn more about the Woodruff Arts Center, please visit www.woodruffcenter.org.

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