



BMA Receives Major Gift to Support Acquisitions for its African Art Collection

The gift coincides with the forthcoming reinstallation of the African, Indigenous American, and Oceanic art galleries, and announcement of its newly adopted collections management policy

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BALTIMORE, MD (June 29, 2021)—The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) announced today that it has received a \$550,000 gift from longstanding museum supporters Amy Gould and Matthew Polk for the exclusive purpose of expanding the museum’s African art collection and related research and publications. The BMA’s collection includes approximately 2,500 works from Africa, and is particularly strong in figurative sculpture from western and central areas of the continent as well as beadwork from its eastern and southern regions. The generous gift arrives as the museum continues to implement its collections roadmap, a multi-year strategic plan that expands the BMA’s efforts to tell more polyphonic narratives and histories and rectify critical artistic omissions across all of the museum’s collecting areas. The gift, which will be referred to as the Amy Gould/Matthew Polk Fund in gratitude to the donors, supports the BMA’s work in further developing the African art collection, engaging in new scholarly study, and articulating more expansive artistic and cultural narratives. The gift also coincides with the BMA’s adoption of new Collections Management Policy, approved by the museum’s Board of Trustees, which includes Amy Gould, on June 22, 2021.

The establishment of the Amy Gould/Matthew Polk Fund also precedes the BMA’s forthcoming reinstallation of art from Africa, Ancient Americas, and Oceania. In addition to reinterpreting the arts of Africa within its existing gallery spaces, the reinstallation includes creating—for the first time in the museum’s history—separate dedicated galleries for Oceanic art and Indigenous art of the Americas. The effort will result in the largest and most ambitious presentation of the BMA’s collection of historic, non-Western art and coincides with the 100th year anniversary of the BMA’s first acquisition of a non-Western artwork. Each of the galleries will provide audiences with a chronological history of art, emphasizing innovation and change over time while contextualizing these artistic transformations within social, political, religious, and cultural histories. These collection galleries have been closed due to the construction of the adjacent Ruth R. Marder Center for Matisse Studies and Nancy Dorman and Stanley Mazaroff Center for the Study of Prints, Drawings and Photographs, and will reopen on December 12, 2021.

“Over the past two years, the BMA has been developing a collections roadmap that addresses omissions and disparities across the entirety of its collection, including a particular focus on arts of Africa and the African diaspora. This expands our vision for

collection diversification beyond work from the Post-War and contemporary eras, where field-wide discussions on diversity are largely focused, and also informs the approach for the reinstallation of our galleries,” said Christopher Bedford, the BMA’s Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director. “We are so grateful to Amy and Matthew for their many years of generous and active support. This incredible gift allows us to begin actualizing our goals for further enhancing our African art collection, which will spur new research and allow us to share new works, ideas, and stories with our audiences.”

Amy L. Gould is a BMA Trustee, the current Chair of the Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Pacific Islands (AAAPI) Art Accessions Committee, and a member of the museum’s Cultural Property Working Group, which was responsible for the development of the BMA’s new Collections Management Policy. Gould is the founder of the Baltimore firm of Gould Architects, P.A.. She has served as President of the Maryland Society of Architects, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Director to the American Institute of Architects National Board and was elected to the AIA College of Fellows. Outside of professional accomplishments, Gould has been deeply involved in arts, co-founding the Historic Textile Research Foundation, an organization which supports research, publication, and exhibition of historically important textiles. She has also served as a Trustee of The Textile Museum in Washington, D.C. Gould holds degrees in both Fine Arts and Architecture from the Rhode Island School of Design.

Matthew S. Polk, Jr. is a former BMA Trustee, a former Chair of the AAAPI Art Accessions Committee, and currently a member of the museum’s Cultural Property Working Group. He was co-founder and chairman of Baltimore-based Polk Audio, Inc., a leading manufacturer of high-fidelity loudspeakers for home, car and computer applications. He is currently a partner in MSI DFAT Services, LLC, a Baltimore-based provider of spacecraft testing services. Polk was a founding member of the Peabody Advisory Council and the Johns Hopkins Physics and Astronomy Advisory Council. He is a current board member of The Walters Art Museum and serves on their Collections committee and a co-founder of the Historic Textile Research Foundation.

Over the past 40 years, Gould and Polk have assembled a collection of significant textiles which are regularly loaned to museums for exhibitions and made available to scholars for research.

“We are pleased and honored that our long-term commitment is now making a meaningful contribution to the BMA’s focus on the arts of Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Pacific Islands,” said Amy Gould and Matthew Polk. “We can learn a great deal from these societies whose art and culture have influenced our modern lives in more ways than most of us imagine. We compliment the BMA for their efforts to continue telling their stories.”

Gallery Installations

The African art galleries—which encompass 2,500 square feet—will feature approximately 90 artworks from across five millennia, beginning with ancient Egyptian stonework and ending with contemporary Nigerian photography. This new presentation works to present the full diversity of African artistic expression while simultaneously placing artworks within their evolving historical contexts. Sections include: the age of empires in western Africa, the rise of the central African states, the spread of Islam in

western and eastern Africa, the impact of European imperialism and colonialism, and the growth and development of movements for independence and self-determination. These different areas of exploration capture the ways that African artistic production has been inextricably intertwined with social, political, and religious movements.

The newly dedicated gallery to Indigenous art of the Americas will focus on the creation and evolution of artworks prior to Spanish colonization of the Americas. The installation will highlight the ways that regional interaction and exchange shaped the trajectory of art, and will emphasize the impact of urbanization in Mesoamerica, the growth and development of regional trade networks across the central American Isthmus, and the impact of antiquity on the art histories of Middle and Late Horizon civilizations of the Andean region. The BMA's collection of Indigenous art from the Ancient American world represents 56 artistic traditions from Central and South America, including Aztec, Teotihuacan, Maya, and Olmec objects from Mesoamerica and Inka, Chimú, Chancay, Huari, Moche, Nasca, and Paracas objects from Andean South America. The BMA's 1,000-object collection of Indigenous art of the Americas created after Spanish colonization will be reinstalled at a later date.

The BMA holds one of the nation's most important collections of Oceanic art with works from all the major regions spanning a 4,000-year time period. The new gallery for this collection will present a chronological survey that begins with Lapita expansion in 1600 BCE and continues until the post-colonial period in the 1970s. The installation will emphasize artworks from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, and highlight the impact of European colonialism, World War II, and post-colonial economic globalization on form, function, and circulation of artworks across every region of the Pacific.

"It has been the norm, for the BMA and throughout most American art museums, to present non-Western art in geographic or thematic groupings. Rather than follow this standard trajectory, the newly reinstalled galleries will present works from the perspective of evolving artistic form and creativity, as inflected by social, political, and cultural changes," Kevin Terval, Associate Curator of African Art and Department Head for the Arts of Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. "This approach gives primacy to historical and artistic evolutions, with a particular eye toward the influence and importance of interaction and exchange between different states, societies, and cultures."

BMA Collections Management Policy

As part of its work to evaluate its collection and further define its acquisitions and presentation priorities, the BMA also adopted a new Collections Management Policy at its June 22 board meeting. The revised policy was developed by the museum's Cultural Property Working Group, which was organized in 2019 and comprised of select BMA curatorial and registration staff, BMA Trustees, and BMA Accessions Committee members.

The policy changes emphasize alignment with the BMA's mission-driven focus on diversity and equity, which informs all of the museum's activities and initiatives. The new policy, in particular, commits the museum to ensuring that its collections are not only legally, but also ethically held, underscores the importance of transparency in its collections management, identifies the BMA's responsibilities in

establishing pathways for preserving and presenting sacred and culturally sensitive material, and creates more robust procedures for remedying any legitimate ownership claims of which the museum becomes aware, either through staff research or the claim of an outside party.

As such, the BMA will share its Ethical Collection and Cultural Property policies on its website in the coming months. It is also committed to posting information regarding all accessioned artworks to its website—a process the museum has begun and will take several years to complete. This includes provenance information as it exists for all ancient art, archaeological materials, Nazi-era artworks, and artworks created or transferred during periods of colonial occupation. The policy reiterates the BMA’s responsibility in researching the histories and provenance of the works in its collection; taking reasonable proactive steps to engage the appropriate authorities or individuals regarding any works that may not be ethically or legally held within its collection; and engaging appropriate cultural and community representatives in the display, interpretation, and care of any sacred or culturally sensitive work. The policy also eases the process for potential claimants to reach out to curatorial leadership by providing details regarding procedures on its website and eliminating the requirement that all claims be supported by documentation.

To date, the BMA has not received any repatriation or restitution requests for any artwork in its collection.

Baltimore Museum of Art

Founded in 1914, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) inspires people of all ages and backgrounds through exhibitions, programs, and collections that tell an expansive story of art—challenging long-held narratives and embracing new voices. Our outstanding collection of more than 95,000 objects spans many eras and cultures and includes the world’s largest public holding of works by Henri Matisse; one of the nation’s finest collections of prints, drawings, and photographs; and a rapidly growing number of works by contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds. The museum is also distinguished by a neoclassical building designed by American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of modern and contemporary sculpture. The BMA is located three miles north of the Inner Harbor, adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University, and has a community branch at Lexington Market. General admission is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art. artbma.org

Visitor Information

General admission to the BMA is free. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Timed reservations, face masks, and answering two questions about COVID-19 exposure are required for all visitors. The Sculpture Gardens are open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to dusk. The museum and gardens are closed New Year’s Day, July 4, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore’s Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit artbma.org.

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