

## UMMA Announces New Acquisitions, Including Major Works by McArthur Binion, Mel Bochner, Catherine Opie, Willie Cole, and Jarod Lew

### *A Gathering* Exhibition Also Features Selection of Works Acquired by the Museum in Recent Years, Highlighting Collecting Vision and Growth

**Ann Arbor, MI—July 25, 2023**—The University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA) announced today that it has acquired a major work by acclaimed artist **McArthur Binion**. *Self: Portrait* (2022) was the centerpiece of the artist's [recent solo exhibition](#) of the same name at Library Street Collective in Detroit. The new work expands on a body of paintings that Binion first created in 2016 that features a layer of collaged photographs and personal documents overlaid with the artist's signature approach to painterly geometric abstraction. The mixed media work is the first by Binion to enter UMMA's collection. It is a museum purchase with support from Joseph and Annette Allen, with proceeds from the sale going to support Binion's foundation Modern Ancient Brown, which nurtures BIPOC artists and writers, and is developing a public skatepark designed by Binion and legendary skateboarder Tony Hawk. UMMA also announced the acquisition of an iconic painting from **Mel Bochner's** *Thesaurus Painting* series, a readymade sculpture by **Willie Cole**, and important photographs by **Catherine Opie** and **Jarod Lew**.

The newly announced acquisitions highlight UMMA's focus on bringing works into the collection that represent formal innovations and experimentations as well as that engage with important societal dialogues, including those relating to migration, race, gender, and ecological change. To capture the development of its collection, UMMA recently opened the exhibition [A Gathering](#), which features objects acquired by the museum from 2019 to 2023. Among the works on view are photographs and works on paper by **Jason DeMarte**, **Jess T. Dugan**, **Jennifer Wynn Reeves**, and **Stephanie Syjuco**; mixed-media and sculptural works by **Mark Dion** and **Suchitra Mattai**, and a painting by **Khaled Al-Saa'i**, among others. Additionally, [in its galleries dedicated to African art](#), UMMA has installed recently acquired sculptures by **Frederick Ebenezer Okai** and **Matthew Angelo Harrison**.

"Artists are integral to enhancing our understanding of the world, to bringing us together in dialogue, and to fostering learning and solution-building to local and global community challenges. As we grow UMMA's collection, we see it as essential to ensure that we are expanding the range of voices, perspectives, and experiences reflected in our holdings—both to capture the vast range of artists pushing and remaking the boundaries of art and to allow us to have more robust conversations with audiences of diverse background and interests. We are excited to share the news of our latest acquisitions and to invite the public in to see some of the works that have entered our collection in recent years, as part of our mission to be transparent and open in our work," said Christina Olsen, UMMA's Director.

**Additional details regarding the group of acquisitions announced today follows below:**

**McArthur Binion, *Self:Portrait*, 2022.** Acclaimed artist McArthur Binion (American, b. 1946) is recognized for creating mixed media works that blend the visual vocabulary of Minimalism with imagery and found materials from his own life. The paintings in the *Self:Portrait* series feature a core layer of personal iconography, developed from copies of photos and personal documents, including the artist's passport and birth certificate. This imagery is, then, covered with rhythmic, geometric patterning in a range of vivid colors, using oil paint stick. The resulting abstract compositions defy easy reading and offer a distinct merger between object and experience and artist and work. The painting is the first such work by the artist to enter UMMA's collection and reflects the museum's commitment to expanding its holdings of works by artists of color and those with ties to Michigan and the region. This work is a museum purchase made possible by Joseph and Annette Allen.

**Mel Bochner, *Blah, Blah, Blah*, 2011.** Mel Bochner (American, b. 1940) is among the leading figures of the conceptual art movements of the 1960s and 1970s. His paintings actively blur the boundaries between linguistic and visual experiences and engage with philosophical and mathematical theories. His active use of repetition and organizational systems highlights humanity's desire to bring order to chaotic and unpredictable happenings and experiences. *Blah, Blah, Blah* is an iconic work from his *Thesaurus Painting* series and captures Bochner's ongoing experimentation with the relationships between words and color, shape, and form. At the same time, the connotations of the repetition of the word "blah" is a subtle commentary on the state of societal discourse. The painting is the first by Bochner to enter UMMA's collection and is a gift of Irving Stenn, Jr., (AB '52, JD '55) who graduated from the University of Michigan and is one of the museum's most ardent and long-standing supporters.

**Catherine Opie, *Justin Bond*, 1993.** Catherine Opie (American, b. 1961) is one of the foremost photographers of American identity and Americana. Over her four-decades-long career, Opie has consistently reinvented her practice by deftly combining formal studio practices with conceptual and documentary photography strategies. *Justin Bond* is from Opie's 50-image *Portraits* series (1993–1997). The series highlights San Francisco's leather S&M community, with individuals posed in the style of half-length portraits against bold jewel-toned backgrounds. In this portrait, Opie represents Mx Justin Vivian Bond, a prolific trans performer and artist who has appeared on and off Broadway and is a strong advocate for trans visibility and rights. The acquisition of *Justin Bond* contributes to UMMA's rapidly growing photography holdings and expands the representation of queer identities within the collection. This purchase was made possible by the UMMA Director's Acquisition Committee, 2023.

**Willie Cole, *Gas Snake*, 1992.** Willie Cole (American, b. 1955) is a conceptual artist who engages with the appropriation of African and African American imagery as well as the significance of mass produced consumer products within our daily lives. He is well-recognized for his sculptural readymades, which he constructs with common objects like high-heeled shoes, hair dryers, bicycle parts, lawn jockeys, and other discarded and found objects and materials. Cole first began creating the *Gas Snake* sculptures at the time of the Gulf War gas crisis in the early 1990s, transforming several discarded gas pump nozzles into sculptural forms that suggest the movements of a snake. The works serve to comment on the

interconnectedness of and meaning held within everyday objects as well as the possibility of formal exploration in the use of found materials. *Gas Snake* is a gift of the Bill Hodges Gallery and is the first work by Cole to enter UMMA's collection.

**Jarod Lew, selections from *Please Take Off Your Shoes series, 2018–2021*.** Jarod Lew (b. 1987) is a Chinese American artist from Metro Detroit, Michigan. His work explores themes of identity, community, and displacement. Lew's series *Please Take off Your Shoes*—from which UMMA is purchasing twelve photographs—features portraits and still lifes set within suburban Southeast Michigan homes. The series was inspired by the discovery that Lew's mother was engaged to Vincent Chin, who was murdered by two autoworkers in Highland Park, Michigan in 1982. Chin's death and the subsequent controversial court ruling in which his murderers were sentenced to probation in lieu of jail time, galvanized the Asian American civil rights movement in Detroit and beyond. *Please Take Off Your Shoes* represents Lew's efforts to reconcile his family's history with his own experience as a first generation Asian American. The acquisition of works from *Please Take Off Your Shoes* follows other recent acquisitions of works by Asian and Asian American artists such as Dinh Q. Lê, Stephanie Syjuco, Suchitra Mattai, and Chitra Ganesh. This purchase was made possible by the UMMA Director's Acquisition Committee, 2023.

#### **About UMMA**

The U-M Museum of Art puts art and ideas at the center of campus and public life. Welcoming more than 1,400,000 visitors each year, UMMA creates experiences that enrich our understanding of one another, foster joy, and build a more just future. Through exhibitions, programs, research, and community partnerships UMMA is redefining what a campus museum can be.

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