

Art History Selects

September 29, 2021 – February 26, 2022
Providence College Galleries
Hunt-Cavanagh Hall



Contemporary artists often obsess over the new, but they also center their creations on research and delving into art history, all in the name of seeking various truths. Artists use their work in a range of ways, from trying to understand how those before them saw the world to showing today's audiences what their predecessors got right and wrong. By drawing mostly from the College's contemporary art collection with expert help from Providence College's art history faculty, *Art History Selects* draws from PCG's art collection to explore how today's artists find inspiration and source material in art of the past.

Amie Cunat

Poppy Blue, 2017

15 x 13 inches

Acrylic and gouache on canvas

Medieval Slump, 2017

15 x 17 inches

Acrylic and gouache on canvas

Window, 2018

10 x 8 inches

Acrylic and gouache on canvas

Demogorgon, 2018

34 x 28 inches

Polyvinyl acrylic and gouache on canvas

“From undulating architectural arches to fragmented mythological demons, Amie Cunat's work both channels and transmogrifies medieval forms. Her vibrant hues, in works like

“*Poppy Blue*,” convert stone Gothic structures into Fauvist bursts of neon color. Cunat's playful and mischievous commentary on the art historical canon breathes into it new life as well as whimsical aesthetic sensibilities.”

— Dr. Joan Branham,
Professor of Art History,
Medieval Art

Amie Cunat's paintings and installations utilize biomorphic forms and garish color palettes to investigate parallels between abstraction and perception. Influenced by depictions of the built environment from a range of sources, from Medieval architecture and Christian and Pagan imagery to 1970s psychedelia and sci-fi and horror movies, Cunat's recent paintings include visions of landscapes and buildings that appear loud and flamboyant at first glance. Their exclamatory presence is heightened by graphic hues and slick lines, but it's their quirks—lopsided windows and melting structures—that encourage longer looking to find both new and familiar references. They further offer a play between the mystifying and goofy, the earthy and transcendent, the familiar and alien. In merging age-old concepts and traditions with newer art methods, Cunat shows that when it comes to visual culture, everything is relative.

Jazzmen Lee-Johnson

Grandma's Lament, 2019

Eleven silkscreens on paper

19 x 11 inches each

“Jazzmen Lee-Johnson’s dystopian images present an oppressive piling up of human detritus, applying pressure on people who respond individually and collectively in postures of anguish and outrage. Amidst this decay, nature intervenes in overlapping patterns and translucent harmonious colors, and people’s awareness and activism present a possibility of escape, and possibly even a pathway to a more hopeful future.”

— Dr. Paul Crenshaw
Associate Professor of Art History,
Renaissance & Baroque Art

Jazzmen Lee-Johnson describes *Grandma’s Lament* as an “Afro-futurist sci-fi graphic novel that chronicles a present-day dystopia, an underwater past, and an astrological plastic future.” The series collapses multiple timelines to tell the story of a West African family. In one timeline, the family is kidnapped from West Africa into the atrocities of the trans-Atlantic slavery. Lee-Johnson depicts this period by alluding to Rembrandt’s *The Three Crosses* print from 1653. In the elder artist’s work, the subject is Jesus Christ on the cross, flanked by the two thieves who were crucified with him, and the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, weeping and supported by the Evangelist. A mass of Roman soldiers on horseback, along with grieving citizens, surround the crosses. A beam of light, representing God’s light from heaven, pierces the darkened sky to envelope the crucified figure of Christ. Rembrandt’s frenzied cross-hatching and a shadow threaten to engulf a whole scene of the figures. This visual treatment transforms the scene from an image of pathos and sacrifice to one of darkness, doubt, and chaos. Lee-Johnson uses similar cross-hatching and shadow techniques to depict the violence and tragedy inflicted upon the family and other Africans by slave-traders. The second timeline shown in *Grandma’s Lament*, however, features a spotlight effect reminiscent of the light from heaven shown in

The Three Crosses. Corollary images with beams of light show the family’s joy and bliss amidst a life in their native lands uninterrupted by the horrors of colonialism.

Elizabeth Atterbury

Center Before Outside (24), 2019

Chine collé and embossing

30 x 22.5 inches

River Poems (9), 2018

Chine collé

30 x 22.5 inches

“The *chine collé* characters in Elizabeth Atterbury’s *River Poem* are fu 福 (fortune), shan 山 (mountain), and wang 王 (king), all combined to form what appears to be a Chinese seal. The fu 福 (fortune) is written as a seal character; however, the wang 王 (king) has a bit of variation from the original with two added triangles. The shan 山 (mountain) is written in the style of an oracle bone script.”

— Dr. Bing Huang,
Assistant Professor of Art History,
Asian Art

Elizabeth Atterbury’s works on view come from a larger portfolio of monotypes for which the artist developed a customized and unconventional use of the intaglio process and colorful arrangements of chine collé* cut-outs. Drawing from memories, genealogy, and the day-to-day, the artist creates symbols and characters, forming her own pseudo-calligraphy practice that is both deeply personal and relatable. A red bounding box is appropriated from Chinese calligraphy practice books, a long upside down “U” embodies the hair of two close relatives, the shape of the tab that tears off the top of Lansinoh breastmilk storage bags is what it is—and something that holds great significance for the artist and many

working mothers. The top left block, which looks like two capital E's back-to-back, is the Chinese symbol for Wang, which means King. The title for one of the works, *Center Before Outside*, is borrowed from instructions on stroke order when writing Chinese characters. Atterbury says of the title, "I chose 'Center Before Outside' as a title... because it is simultaneously literal and poetic, two qualities I think I am always striving for in my work."

* Chine collé is a technique, used in conjunction with printmaking processes such as etching or lithography, that results in a two-layered paper artwork: a tissue-thin paper, cut to the size of the printing plate, and a larger, thicker support paper below. The two papers are placed on top of an inked plate and run together through a printing press, sometimes with a thin layer of adhesive between them to reinforce the bond produced through the pressure of the press. The result is a subtle, delicate backdrop to the cut-out papers. Chine is the French word for China, referring to the fact that the thin paper originally used with this technique was imported from China. In addition to China, paper was also imported from India or Japan. Collé is the French word for "glued."

Vivian Greven

Untitled (Judith II), 2020
Silkscreen
27 x 23 inches

Vivian Greven
<3, 2018
Oil on wood panel
16 x 9 x 1 inches

"The Venus de Milo referenced in Vivian Greven's work epitomizes the ancient Greek's focus on, and even deification of, the ideal of beauty. The statue reflects their admiration of

nudity that would become so influential in later western art. Its discovery and subsequent display in the Louvre in the early 19th century would have a great impact on the modern western aesthetic, as well the intentions and desires of their museums."

— Dr. Thomas Strasser,
Professor of Art History,
Ancient Art & Archaeology

Vivian Greven is interested in how Ancient Greek ideas and aesthetics endure across time and cultures. Her artwork mingles various notions of bodies, being and representation, by merging concepts of classical antiquity with pop art and digital culture. Greven's <3 is one of a series of paintings on bust-shaped MDF panels. It riffs off the highly stylized figures and color palettes of the great Renaissance and High Mannerist artists who revered Classical antiquity. *Judith II*, a hand-cut silkscreen, blends historical depictions of Venus with those of Judith, the brash and seductive biblical woman who asks God to make her a good liar. Both works suggest the ideal beauty and conflation of love and lust common to Classical and successive eras. Greven also infuses into them contemporary symbols like emojis and other subtle references to human intimacy and communication methods common throughout the history of art. Greven's compositions also play with line, shape, and surface to show how perfection was and is contrived by the artist's hand and the cutting-edge tools of their time. Ancient Greek artists, for example, chiseled marble and stone to achieve proportions rarely seen in real life. Renaissance and neo-Classical artists painstakingly whitened and smoothed skin with their fine brushes. Likewise, Greven relies on Photoshop methods—with names plucked from art history like 'marble effect' and 'chiaroscuro'—to advance plan her paintings. The many art historical and contemporary historical nestlings of the artist's work

ultimately dissolve the hierarchies between original, reproduction and simulation.

Baseera Khan

I AM A BODY (Light Brown), 2020

I AM A BODY (Peaches), 2020

I AM A BODY (Original), 2020

Three-color screen prints

Each 24 x 18 inches

“Throughout the last century, visual artists have questioned the value of depicting the world around them and the divisions between different kinds of art making. Baseera Khan’s use of the written word in place of and in concert with the image reflects the breakdown of such categories: image/text, painting/poetry, art/politics, etc. Both questioning binaries and hybrid answers like Khan’s are emblematic of contemporary art.”

— Dr. Elizabeth Welch,
Visiting Assistant Professor
of Art History, Modern &
Contemporary Art

Baseera Khan thinks of their own body as an archive, often riffing on historical imagery to visualize the lived experiences of intersectional identity. Khan’s *I AM A BODY* screen prints represent the ongoing struggle for basic human rights experienced by diverse groups. The series of artworks is a contemporary adaptation of the famous *I AM A MAN* protest signs from the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike. Khan tweaks the phrasing to become gender inclusive. They depict a wide range of non-White skin tones to represent BIPOC communities’ continued fights for racial justice. (The color in one of the prints was taken from a scan of Khan’s skin tone by a makeup company’s concealer match software. The channeling of information between physical and digital sources also hints at the

danger of cultural generalization, even in the pursuit of solidarity.) The crescent moons at top-left symbolize Khan’s own Muslim faith but more broadly represent the ongoing pursuit of religious freedom by marginalized faith groups around the world. Overall, *I AM A BODY* is a selection of portraits of the body not as an individual figure but as a nexus of personal and collective politics.

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Art History Selects is presented in conjunction with *Then, Now, Next: 50 Years of Women* at Providence College. The exhibition’s design celebrates the faculty and intellectual rigor of Providence College’s Art History while also showcasing a small selection of collected artworks made by artists who identify as women and gender non-binary. Moreover, statements from each faculty member reflect on the important roles art history and the art of today play in helping us understand the world around us.

The exhibition is organized by Jamilee Lacy, PCG’s Director and Chief Curator, with assistance from PC/PCG staff Scott Alario, Elizabeth Corkery, Angela Crenshaw, Kate McNamara and Matthew Patrei, as well as current students Zari Apodaca (PC ’23) and Daniel Carrero (PC ’23). The exhibition is supported by Providence College’s Art & Art History Department, Office of Academic Affairs and School of Arts & Sciences.

