

Drawing Conclusions, January 22, 2016-September 25, 2016

Visual art—like storytelling—communicates meaning, but rarely does an artwork hold a single meaning. A great pleasure of art is that each viewer brings her or his own experience to a work, often revealing many ways to interpret it.

Drawn from the Museum's collection of works on paper, this exhibition explores the multivalence of narrative in contemporary art. It presents a diverse collection of works that tell stories, blending the public and personal, the real and fictional. Whether serving as a stage for surreal dreaming or a site to ponder history and identity, each artwork draws on an expanded understanding of narrative and the forms it can take. We invite viewers to draw their own conclusions.

The exhibition was organized with the help of Emilia Mickevicius, PhD candidate at Brown University, and Jagdeep Raina, MFA candidate at RISD, both assistants in the Department of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Marlene Dumas
South African, b.1953

White Lies, 2001

Watercolor and graphite on paper

Paula and Leonard Granoff Fund and Mary B. Jackson Fund 2003.78

Marlene Dumas creates visual narratives from her personal archive of newspaper and magazine clippings and photographs of family and friends. In her transformation of this source material, the identities of her subjects become anonymous and open to new meanings.

Here a woman lies on her back; the viewer's interpretation is guided by the inscription at the top of the sheet, which alludes to psychological turmoil and deceit. "White lies" typically connotes a harmless lie, but in the context of Dumas's work, it may refer to race. Hovering above the woman, the text suggests an inner monologue, providing an example of the way the artist often blends the personal and the political.



Larry Day
American, 1921 - 1998

The Venus Society: An Entertainment in Eight Episodes, ca. 1967

Watercolor and graphite on paper

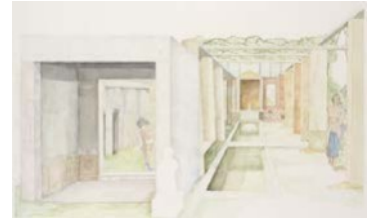
Gift of Ruth Fine in honor of Lora Urbanelli 2005.109.1

This group of eight watercolors showcases Larry Day's self-labeled

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"ironic realism," comprising equal parts whimsy and restraint, familiarity and strangeness. Arranged in a sequence that suggests an evolving story, the frames depict people engaged in a range of social interactions. The series culminates with a group of figures dancing among ruins, and could be interpreted as an extended metaphor about human society and relationships.

Larry Day
American, 1921 - 1998
No. 1: The Foundations, The Venus Society: An Entertainment in Eight Episodes, ca. 1967
Watercolor and graphite on Rives paper
Gift of Ruth Fine in honor of Lora Urbanelli 2005.109.1A



Larry Day
American, 1921 - 1998
No. 2: The Establishment of Ritual, The Venus Society: An Entertainment in Eight Episodes, ca. 1967
Watercolor and graphite on Rives paper
Gift of Ruth Fine in honor of Lora Urbanelli 2005.109.1B



Larry Day
American, 1921 - 1998
No. 3: The Discovery of Another Society, The Venus Society: An Entertainment in Eight Episodes, ca. 1967
Watercolor and graphite on Rives paper
Gift of Ruth Fine in honor of Lora Urbanelli 2005.109.1C



Larry Day
American, 1921 - 1998
No. 4: The Other Society's Base, The Venus Society: An Entertainment in Eight Episodes, ca. 1967
Watercolor and graphite on Rives paper
Gift of Ruth Fine in honor of Lora Urbanelli 2005.109.1D



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Larry Day
American, 1921 - 1998
No. 5: The Struggle for the Uncommitted, The Venus Society: An Entertainment in Eight Episodes, ca. 1967
Watercolor and graphite on Rives paper
Gift of Ruth Fine in honor of Lora Urbanelli 2005.109.1E



Larry Day
American, 1921 - 1998
No. 6: The Search, Atonement, The Venus Society: An Entertainment in Eight Episodes, ca. 1967
Watercolor and graphite on Rives paper
Gift of Ruth Fine in honor of Lora Urbanelli 2005.109.1F



Larry Day
American, 1921 - 1998
No. 7: The Merger, The Venus Society: An Entertainment in Eight Episodes, ca. 1967
Watercolor and graphite on Rives paper
Gift of Ruth Fine in honor of Lora Urbanelli 2005.109.1G



Larry Day
American, 1921 - 1998
No. 8: The Dance, The Venus Society: An Entertainment in Eight Episodes, ca. 1967
Watercolor and graphite on Rives paper
Gift of Ruth Fine in honor of Lora Urbanelli 2005.109.1H



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Marcel Dzama
Canadian, b. 1974
Untitled, 2005
Ink, graphite, and watercolor on paper
Paula and Leonard Granoff Fund 2005.55

This intimately scaled drawing depicts a group of elegant characters with a shabbily dressed man and companion alien creature, inviting the viewer to contemplate the reasons for their gathering. The blank background and shallow depth suggest this is a stage set for a drama.

This is one of a many similar drawings by Dzama with a revolving set of characters. Fantastical and grotesque, sexual and innocent, this example weaves together typical themes in Dzama's enigmatic oeuvre.



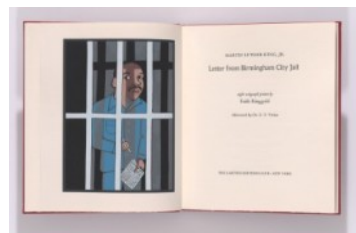
Shahzia Sikander
Pakistani and American, b.1969
Embark Disembark V, 2004
Offset lithograph and screenprint on paper
Gift of Roger and Gayle Mandle 2008.95.19

The organic, washy rendering of the mysterious figures in this print makes them appear to float on the paper's surface. The two men are connected to one another by a rope, with animals gathered at their feet.



Shahzia Sikander trained in Indo-Persian miniature painting in her hometown, Lahore, Pakistan, before coming to RISD to study. Much of her imagery comes out of the miniature tradition, but here it is transformed by her fluid drawing style to create an open-ended narrative that suggests mythic origins.

Faith Ringgold
American, b. 1930
Martin Luther King, Jr., author
American, 1929 - 1968
Limited Editions Club, publisher
Letter from Birmingham City Jail, 2008
Book containing eight color screenprints
Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 2009.85



In this book, iconic scenes from the civil rights movement accompany a letter Dr. King wrote while jailed in Birmingham, Alabama. Ringgold reflects in the introduction, "What [King] has to say about the life and struggle of black people in America is a treatise on freedom and justice and a model for democracy in the world."

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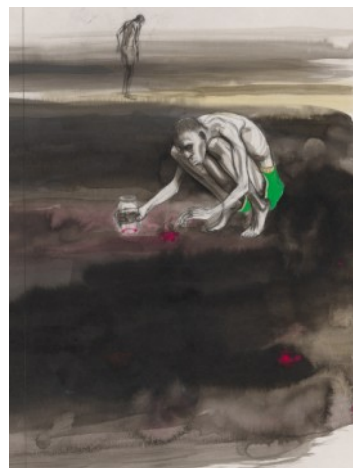
Charles Avery
Scottish, b.1973

Untitled (man gathering carmine), 2012

Graphite, ink, acrylic, and gouache on paper

Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2012.90.1

Here, amidst a barren landscape rendered in dense washes of black ink, a wizened figure harvests a precious pink substance. Since 2004, Charles Avery has created drawings and sculptures depicting a fictional territory called "The Island." Each of the works expands upon the story of the island's inhabitants and their customs and beliefs. Imbued with a mixture of seriousness and humor, Avery's epic series uses the island's topography as a stage for exploring various philosophical problems, invoking a range of themes from the concept of utopia to globalization.



Robyn O'Neil

American, b. 1977

how he left them, 2006

Graphite on paper

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert D. Mann 2013.51.13

In *How He Left Them*, a man wearing a suit looks toward a darkening sky, upon which O'Neil has drawn a crescent-shaped rupture. A second figure is dwarfed by the scenery in *This Has Changed Him*, hanging suspended in the gap between two sharply soaring mountain peaks that face a choppy sea.



O'Neil's psychologically charged landscapes appear surreal and dream-like, separated from the flow of time. Both of these drawings are ciphers; the titles allude to narratives but stop short of divulging clear stories.

Robyn O'Neil

American, b. 1977

This Has Changed Him, 2006

Graphite on paper

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert D. Mann 2013.51.14

In *How He Left Them*, a man wearing a suit looks toward a darkening sky, upon which O'Neil has drawn a crescent-shaped rupture. A second figure is dwarfed by the scenery in *This Has Changed Him*, hanging suspended in the gap between two sharply soaring mountain peaks that face a choppy sea.



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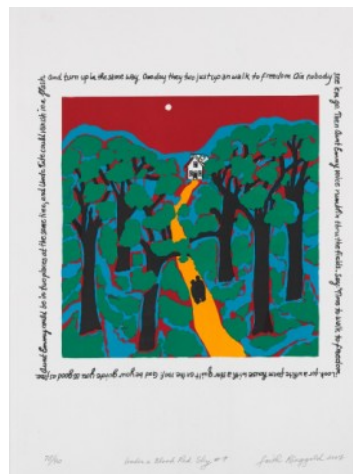
Chris Ofili
English, b. 1968
After the Dance, from the portfolio Rivington Place 2006
Color screenprint on paper
Walter H. Kimball Fund 2014.35.5

Chris Ofili uses deep blue hues to portray this sensual scene of a couple dancing at night. The lush setting is inspired by the landscape of Trinidad, where the artist moved in 2005. The darkness of night there, especially compared to the illuminated urban landscape Ofili had known growing up in England, inspired a series of paintings titled *The Blue Rider*. Ofili explains: "I've found that the night and twilight here enhances the imagination. . . . It's a different level of consciousness that is less familiar to me, and stimulating through a degree of fear and mystery."



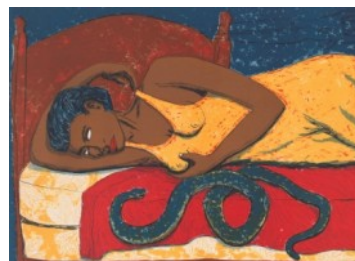
Faith Ringgold
American, b. 1930
Robert Franklin, printer
Under the Blood Red Sky, 2007
Color offset lithograph on paper
Gift of the Brandywine Workshop and Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 2014.66.31

This scene, of a road leading to a small white house, is bordered by text that narrates the journey of two runaway slaves migrating North via the Underground Railroad. The print is one of many versions of the scene, which artist Faith Ringgold has sometimes titled *Coming to Jones Road under a Blood Red Sky*. The phrase "coming to Jones Road" alludes to Ringgold's difficult move in 1992 from Harlem to Englewood, New Jersey, where, she later recounted, the neighbors "saw my presence on Jones Road as a threat to the 'quality' of their lives."



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Alison Saar
American, b. 1956
Robert Franklin, printer
Black Snake Blues, 1994
Color offset lithograph on paper
Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 2014.66.44



The title of this piece is taken from the song “Black Snake Blues,” first recorded by Victoria Spivey in 1926 and better known by Blind Lemon Jefferson’s 1927 version, “Black Snake Moan.” The song’s themes of longing and loss color this evocative lithograph of a woman lying on a bed cupping her breast, her eyes vacant, with a snake coiled beside her. The relationship between the woman and the creature remains ambiguous, but it suggests sexual desire as well as Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

Kara Walker
American, b. 1969
A Special Attraction, 2014
Watercolor on paper
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2015.15.1



These watercolors address the complicated and brutal histories of slavery and the sugar trade. *A Special Attraction* depicts small figures climbing upon the enigmatic landscape of a large white sphinx. A person at the bottom of the drawing appears to stir a vat of molasses.

Kara Walker made these watercolors in the wake of *A Subtlety* (2014), her monumental installation in a former sugar refinery in Brooklyn, New York. Throughout its duration, *A Subtlety* served as a site that examined the fraught history of sugar production and honored the Caribbean slaves who fed the desire for sugar in all its forms. These watercolors are similarly discomfiting, prompting the viewer to consider how the dark histories of human behavior continue to inform the present.

Kara Walker
American, b. 1969
Whip, 2014
Watercolor on paper
Paula and Leonard Granoff Fund 2015.15.2



These watercolors address the complicated and brutal histories of slavery and the sugar trade. *Whip* is saturated with trauma and pain; sketched on a ground of crimson wash, a slave harvesting sugar cane casts an apprehensive backward glance. Further in the distance, a

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man whips a crouching female.

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Raghubir Singh

Indian, 1942-1999

Men with Popsicles, 1984

Dye transfer print

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Gilman Angier 84.245

In this color photograph, Raghubir Singh elevates a mundane document of everyday life to something extraordinary. Five men sit placidly on the ground eating identical bright-orange popsicles, gazing directly into the camera. From the popsicles to the scorching yellow cloth of the turban to the pale blue and white of the men's *kurtas*, shimmering hues capture the essence of the locale—Jodhpur, India—and reflect the lives and relationships of the men.

