

## *Stranger Than Paradise*, July 14, 2017-February 25, 2018

This presentation of works, from ancient Greek pottery to contemporary objects, considers the changing—and often unusual—relationships humans have with the natural world. Early examples depict forests and fields as backdrops for hunting scenes or for mythological icons. Paintings by Impressionist Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Surrealist Wifredo Lam suggest significantly different notions of communion between people and nature. More recent paintings, sculptures, and photographs further explore this unsettled and complicated relationship and reflect on the destruction of the very environment that sustains us. Other works in this gallery and elsewhere in the museum—for example, Paul Morrison's Exine mural—offer a range of perspectives between these concepts, and identify nature as a force of empowerment or as a way to escape an increasingly technologized and industrialized world.

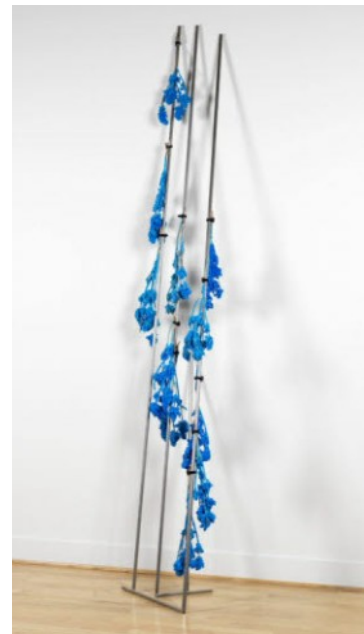
Dominic Molon  
Richard Brown Baker Curator of Contemporary Art  
RISD Museum

The RISD Museum is supported by a grant from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, through an appropriation by the Rhode Island General Assembly and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and with the generous partnership of the Rhode Island School of Design, its Board of Trustees, and Museum Governors.

### CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Roger Hiorns  
English, b.1975  
*Untitled*, 2005  
Steel, thistles, copper sulfate, silicone, and Velcro  
Richard Brown Baker Fund for Contemporary British Art 2007.16

*Untitled* was made by immersing thistles in a bright blue bath of copper sulfate. Over time, crystals developed on the thistles' surface. Hiorns has used this approach throughout his career, yet its application to natural phenomena adds a particularly poetic dimension, evoking cycles of death and rebirth. The attachment of the crystal-encrusted thistles to metal rods not only provides a practical presentational framework, but also suggests nature's complicated coexistence with humankind.



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Ron Nagle

American, b. 1939

*Waiting for Jumbot*, 2009

Earthenware with glaze

Purchased with funds donated by Yvette Boisclair and Mark Mandell  
in honor of Judith Tannenbaum 2009.94

*Waiting for Jumbot* is part of Nagle's ongoing *Thin Fins* series of ceramic scenes, developed between 1998 and 2002 and from 2007 to the present. Here a red cube-like form is placed a pinkish-gray stage-like setting that also resembles the ledge of a mountain. The work's title and the cube's isolation and the rough gray texture surrounding it suggest Samuel Beckett's existentialist drama *Waiting for Godot*, as well as the famous 19th-century circus elephant, Jumbo.



Rina Banerjee

Indian, b. 1963

Exit Art, publisher

American, 1982 - 2012

*Dangerous World, lava and erasable flower, oil and radiation filled with power...*, from the portfolio "Ecstasy" 2010

Inkjet, screenprint, hand coloring, and collage on paper

Gift of Exit Art 2012.133.2.1

*Freedom is the most expensive commodity; nature the most dangerous beauty. My work examines both. My art depicts a delicate world that is also aggressive, tangled, manipulated, fragile, and very, very dense.*

—Rina Banerjee



*Dangerous World, lava and erasable flower, oil and radiation filled with power* presents a group of female figures captivated by the strange forms hovering over them as they float above amorphous terrain. Banerjee frequently places her subjects in fantastic landscapes that are in a state of transformation and that feature creatures that appear to be hybrids of bird and beasts. Her loosely gestural rendering of the scene accentuates and exaggerates its outlandishly unreal character.

Justine Kurland

American, b. 1969

*Smoke Bombs*, 2000

Color chromogenic print

Mary B. Jackson Fund 2012.40

In this photograph, adolescent girls are depicted in a neglected space under a New Jersey highway overpass, where the sprawl of suburban

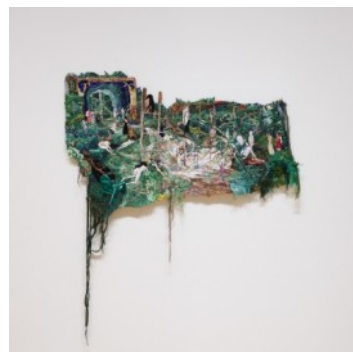


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development meets the natural wilderness. The young women play with fireworks, amplifying the vulnerability and precariousness of their situation. Kurland's composition is reminiscent of historical works featuring figures set against a pastoral backdrop—for example François Boucher's canvas at right.

Sophia Narrett  
American, b. 1987  
*An Origin of Dolls*, 2013-2014  
Embroidery thread on fabric  
Mary B. Jackson Fund 2014.83

*An Origin of Dolls* is part of a body of embroidered works that present strange, elaborate, and often sexualized narratives. Its composition of figures is similar to that found in traditional history paintings on view in this gallery by Francois Boucher and Arthur Bowen Davies. Unlike those works, however, Narrett's imagery was drawn from erotic sites on the internet. The work's embroidered construction lends it an amorphous and more tactile quality, allowing the embroidery's material sensuality to accentuate the pictorial content.



Angela Dufresne  
American, b. 1969  
*Man and Kid*, 2014  
Oil on canvas  
Mary B. Jackson Fund 2015.3

This painting depicts a barely clothed young man with blood streaming down his face; he emerges from the woods, carrying a baby goat. The relationship between the man and the kid is left disturbingly ambiguous, with no clear indication given as to whether the man was wounded while helping the animal or while forcibly abducting it. Dufresene's intense evocation of violence—the blood on the man's face—contrasts with the lustrous, inviting quality of the tree leaves and other vegetation surrounding the figures.



Michael E. Smith  
American, b. 1977  
*Untitled*, 2016  
Door, bird, plastic  
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2016.91



In *Untitled*, a used door (from a house in Providence) has been cut

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into a shape that evokes a cloud or a landscape or seascape, with a pigeon encased in plastic completing one of the door's contours. Smith's ongoing practice combines widely varied objects and materials, enabling radically new ways to understand worldly phenomena. This sculpture encourages us to address its individual components, while the assemblage as a whole prompts consideration of our increasingly complicated relationships to natural and built environments, if not objects themselves.

Tomory Dodge  
American, b. 1974  
*Nature Study*, 2006  
Oil on canvas  
Gift of Dr. Paul Monroe 2016.92

In *Nature Study*, a tree appears to have weathered a tornado or hurricane, and now only its most basic elements remain. Dodge's painting not only evokes the alarming frequency with which weather-related catastrophes now occur, but presents the tree as a symbol of survival and perseverance. In this sense, it also suggests the pathetic fallacy, or the attribution of human feelings to animals or objects.



Greek  
*Wine jug (oinochoe)*, ca. 610 BCE  
Terracotta  
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 28.060

This ancient ceramic wine jug is from Rhodes, a Greek island situated at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. It was painted in the Wild Goat style, which evolved in Greece during the seventh and sixth centuries BCE as a result of increased contact with other cultures farther east. The decoration here presents natural motifs such as goats and flowers, as well as a mythological griffin and sphinx. The emphasis on a more naturalistic representation of the outside world and the combination of real and fictional subjects continues to be developed in the present day by artists such as Tomory Dodge and Angela Dufresne, whose works hang at opposite ends of this gallery.



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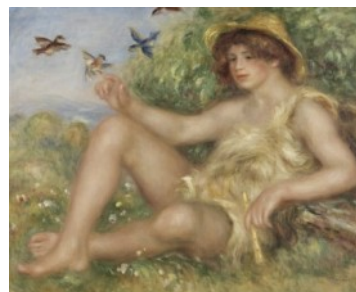
Arthur Bowen Davies  
American, 1862-1928  
*Clothed in Dominion*, ca. 1912  
Oil on canvas  
Bequest of Miss Lizzie P. Bliss 31.336

This painting presents a group of young men moving gracefully in a forest setting that also resembles a theatrical set. Davies's treatment of the figures' movement reflects his avid admiration of both ancient Greek art and modern dance. The title *Clothed in Dominion* suggests that the unclothed men are metaphorically dressed in the power (or dominion) of their own muscular bodies or in their power over the natural world, of which they have become a part.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir  
French, 1841-1919  
*Young Shepherd in Repose (Portrait of Alexander Thurneysen)*, 1911  
Oil on canvas  
Museum Works of Art Fund 45.199

In this painting, Renoir depicts Alexander Thurneysen—the 12-year-old son of a wealthy German industrialist patron—as a young shepherd reclining in a field of flowers. Both the figure and landscape are rendered in a luxuriant, rosy palette using fluid strokes applied in thin layers. Thurneysen's languid pose, loosely adapted from that of the Greek god Dionysus on the Parthenon frieze, indicates Renoir's fascination with classical sculpture. As such, the work departs from the emphasis on modern everyday life typically found in Impressionist painting, and anticipates the return to ancient styles and forms in the work of other modern artists in the early 1900s.



Attributed to François Boucher  
French, 1703-1770  
*Bird-Catching Cherubs (Summer) L'Amour Oiseleur (L'Été)*, 1732-1733  
Oil on canvas  
Anonymous gift 64.115

This painting depicts *putti*—childlike angels that have appeared in Western art since the Renaissance—as a brotherly group of bird-catchers. Intended to amuse and delight, the putti are presented in a natural setting, celebrating the virtues of summer.



Boucher's interpretations of classical subjects and themes of love were extremely popular with French royalty in the 1700s—and in particular King Louis XV's mistress, Madame de Pompadour—and became synonymous with the frivolous aspect of Rococo tastes in fashion, interior decoration, and easel painting.

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Wilhelm Frederik van Royen  
Dutch, 1645-1723  
*The Young Hunter*, ca. 1706  
Oil on canvas  
Museum Membership Fund 67.009

The subject of *The Young Hunter* rests in a pastoral setting with his dog and the animals killed on his hunt. This work represents two traditional genres in Dutch painting of the 1600s and 1700s. The first of these, the *vanitas*, is a still-life containing symbols of death or change, reminding viewers of their own mortality. The second genre, the *jachtstillevens*, or "gamepiece," is a still-life that includes game or a reference to hunting. Works like *The Young Hunter* bestowed an elevated sense of social status on their owners by emphasizing leisure activity and accumulated bounty.



Wifredo Lam  
Cuban, 1902-1982  
*Near the Virgin Islands (Près des Îles Vierges)*, 1959  
Oil, charcoal and pastel on canvas  
Nancy Sayles Day Collection of Modern Latin American Art 69.054

This darkly tropical setting combines images from African tribal sculpture and Afro-Cuban deities and rituals with references to slavery in Cuba, including sugar cane and prostitution. During World War II Lam went to Martinique, where he strongly identified with Negritude, a movement that flourished in the 1940s. Lam became the most important painter associated with the movement, which protested the suppression of black culture in the colonized West Indies. *Near the Virgin Islands* is emblematic of Negritude's celebration of authentic sources in its assured use of the linear, highly stylized pictorial forms found in African sculpture.

