

YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY WELCOMES TWO NEW COLLECTIONS CURATORS

Mark D. Mitchell, the Holcombe T. Green Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture

Barbara Plankensteiner, the Frances and Benjamin Benenson Foundation Curator of African Art



Mark D. Mitchell, the Holcombe T. Green Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture

October 1, 2015, New Haven, Conn. – After extensive searches, the Yale University Art Gallery is delighted to welcome two new collections curators to the museum.

Mark D. Mitchell, the new Holcombe T. Green Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture, comes to the Gallery from his most recent position as the Associate Curator of American Art and Manager of the Center for American Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Mitchell began work in Philadelphia in 2007, having previously held curatorial posts at the National Academy Museum in New York and the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, in Hanover, New Hampshire. He has organized notable exhibitions of American landscape painting, including studies of George Inness, Francis Silva, and James Suydam, and contributed to important surveys of American drawings and watercolors at both the Hood Museum of Art and the Princeton University Art Museum.

Mitchell was a co-curator of *Art across America*, a comprehensive survey of American art held at the National Museum of Korea in Seoul that was organized in partnership with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Terra Foundation for American Art. He is currently completing work on *Audubon to Warhol: The Art of American Still Life*, a landmark survey of the genre that opens at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in October 2015. Mitchell holds a doctorate in American art from Princeton University and completed his undergraduate work at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

The American art collection is at the historical heart of the Gallery, which was founded in 1832 by patriot-artist John Trumbull, who donated more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College. Trumbull pioneered the genre of American history painting with his depictions of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and scenes from the Revolutionary War. Today, these works remain treasures of the museum's holdings within an encyclopedic collection of more than 200,000 objects. Mitchell recognizes the extraordinary opportunities afforded by this context and that of the University



George Inness, *Lake Nemi*, 1857. Oil on canvas. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Mrs. Jane Hubinger Pabst

more broadly, stating, “American art is a crossroads of the world, and its history can and should offer new perspectives on the wider appreciation of art. Yale’s global vision makes it an appropriate setting in which to develop a broader understanding of the American story.” He also looks forward to delving into the collection more specifically, explaining, “Opportunities for future study abound in the Gallery’s American art collection – not only in the areas of narrative and landscape painting but also in sculpture, portraiture, and works on paper.” Jock Reynolds, the Henry J. Heinz II Director, adds, “We are thrilled to have recruited one of the finest young curator-scholars in the field of American art. Mark possesses a great eye, thorough knowledge of subjects, and a full understanding of what it means to work closely with students and active learners of all ages within a university teaching museum.”



Barbara Plankensteiner, the Frances and Benjamin Benenson Foundation Curator of African Art

Barbara Plankensteiner is the Gallery’s new Frances and Benjamin Benenson Foundation Curator of African Art. Most recently, she was the Deputy Director, Chief Curator, and Curator of Sub-Saharan Africa Collections at the Weltmuseum, Vienna, where she was first appointed curator in 1998 and where she also served briefly as acting director. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Arts Council of the African Studies Association and the International Committee for Museums of Ethnography.

Since 2002, Plankensteiner has taught courses and seminars at the Austrian Academy of Fine Arts and in the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology and the Department of African Studies at the University of Vienna, where she earned her PH.D. In 2007 she organized the seminal traveling exhibition *Benin: Kings and Rituals, Court Arts from Nigeria*, the publication for which is now the standard reference for the field. More recently, Plankensteiner co-curated the traveling exhibitions *African Lace: A History of Trade, Creativity, and Fashion in Nigeria* (2010–11) and *Fetish Modernity: Immer and Überall* (Always and Everywhere; 2012–13), demonstrating the range and depth of her research. She is the author of numerous scholarly books, exhibition catalogues, and articles on African art, ethnography, and material culture.

Plankensteiner describes the Gallery’s African art collection as “particularly strong” with “rare works of little-studied art traditions in Nigeria.” Among her favorite objects is a beautiful Owo tusk with refined relief carvings from the Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933, Collection, an object from an area closely related to the Benin Kingdom, where she has worked before. In 2016, ten years after the debut of the Laura and James J. Ross Gallery of African Art, Plankensteiner will reinstall the collection of African art, giving students, scholars, and visitors the opportunity to see the works in a new light. Plankensteiner states, “I am looking forward to working with students to explore the collection further and to start conversations about contemporary perspectives and modes of representing African art and archaeology in an American university museum. I further aim to look more closely into the biographies of the works of art in the collection, their trajectories, and related shifts of meaning and interpretation.”

“While the Yale University Art Gallery has been for several generations steward to works of art from the African continent, it has only been a member of the international community of museums that

collect and study African art for little more than a decade,” explains Laurence Kanter, Chief Curator and the Lionel Goldfrank III Curator of European Art. “We are thrilled to have Barbara Plankensteiner join us now; her experience and her expertise are certain to open and solidify relationships with sister institutions worldwide, from our own Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History across campus to the great African state collections with which she is so familiar and where she has always been a welcomed colleague and collaborator.”

About the American Paintings and Sculpture Collection

Yale University has been collecting American art for more than 250 years. In 1832 it erected the first art museum on a college campus in North America, with the intention of housing John Trumbull’s paintings of the American Revolution – including his iconic painting *The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776* – and close to 100 of his portraits of Revolutionary and Early Republic worthies. Since then, the collection of the Yale University Art Gallery has grown to include celebrated works of art from virtually every period in American history. Encompassing an exquisite 18th-century watercolor-on-ivory memorial portrait of a bride, paintings of the towering grandeur of the American West in the 19th century, and jazz-influenced abstractions of the early 20th century, the Gallery’s collection reflects the diversity and artistic ambitions of the nation.

About the African Art Collection

The Yale University Art Gallery’s collection of art from Africa south of the Sahara began with gifts of several textiles in 1937 and now numbers some 1,800 objects in wood, metal, ivory, ceramic, and other materials. Major milestones in forming the collection occurred in 1954, with the acquisition of the Linton Collection of African Art, purchased for the Gallery by Mr. and Mrs. James M. Osborn, and in 2004, with the gift of the collection of nearly 600 African objects from Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933. Concurrent with the 2004 gift, Benenson endowed a new curatorial position, the Frances and Benjamin Benenson Foundation Curator of African Art, and the Gallery’s Department of African Art was born. In 2010 the museum received a collection of approximately 200 African antiquities from SusAnna and Joel B. Grae.

Yale University Art Gallery

The Yale University Art Gallery, the oldest college art museum in the United States, was founded in 1832 when the patriot-artist John Trumbull gave more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College. Since then its collections have grown to more than 200,000 objects ranging in date from ancient times to the present.



Tusk Carved in Relief, Guinea Coast, Nigeria, 15th century. Elephant ivory tusk. Yale University Art Gallery, Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933, Collection

General Information

The Yale University Art Gallery is located at 1111 Chapel Street, New Haven, Connecticut. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, 10 am–5 pm; Thursday until 8 pm (September–June); and Saturday–Sunday, 11 am–5 pm. The Gallery is closed Mondays and major holidays. Free and open to the public. For general information, please call 203.432.0600 or visit the website at www.artgallery.yale.edu.

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