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The National Gallery of Art Acquires Its First Work by Carrie Mae Weems, Screenprints from Romare Bearden's Epic *Odysseus Suite* Series, and Other Rarities



Carrie Mae Weems

May Flowers

chromogenic print, printed 2013

image: 78.74 × 78.74 cm (31 × 31 in.)

framed: 85.09 × 85.09 cm (33 1/2 × 33 1/2 in.)

Alfred H. Moses and Fern M. Schad Fund

Washington, DC—At its most recent meeting of the Board of Trustees, the National Gallery of Art acquired its first work by the revered photographer and video installation artist Carrie Mae Weems.

Also entering the Gallery's collection is a complete set of screenprints from Romare Bearden's groundbreaking series *The Odysseus Suite*, along with an exceedingly rare chiaroscuro woodcut from the Renaissance. Moreover, the acquisition of a dual-sided figure drawing by Giovanni Battista Piranesi bolsters the Gallery's position as the top repository of etchings and illustrated books by the renowned artist, archaeologist, and architect.

"The opportunity to acquire these significant works speaks volumes about the depth and breadth of the Gallery's collection," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "Yet again our trustees have demonstrated tremendous wisdom and foresight in both strengthening and diversifying our permanent collection."

***May Flowers* (2002)**

In this photograph, Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953)—recipient of the prestigious MacArthur Foundation "genius grant"—trains her lens on three young African American girls posed languidly in the grass. The result is a photograph that not only recalls 19th-century portraits of childhood and the rituals of spring, but also is a compelling statement about race and class in American society.

It was purchased with the Alfred H. Moses and Fern M. Schad Fund.

***Hercules and the Nemean Lion* (c. 1566) and *The Odysseus Suite* (1979)**

Nearly four centuries passed between the lifetimes of Italian Renaissance engraver Niccolò

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Boldrini (c. 1510–c. 1566) and African American artist and writer Romare Bearden (1911–1988), yet both artists are linked by a common pursuit: rendering and reinterpreting mythological narratives.

Boldrini's *Hercules and the Nemean Lion* (c. 1566) is a highly prized chiaroscuro woodcut that portrays the first labor of Hercules. Although a commonplace motif in ancient Roman decorative arts that found renewed popularity during the Renaissance, this print is unique due to its size, quality, and condition.

Bearden's screenprints from *The Odysseus Suite* recast Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey* with black protagonists, underscoring the myth's universality. Bearden said that he wanted the "child in Benin or [the one] in Louisiana" to appreciate the myth's relevancy.

Hercules and the Nemean Lion was purchased through the Pepita Milmore Memorial Fund. *The Odysseus Suite* was purchased as the gift of Richard A. Simms.

Dual-Sided Piranesi Drawing Bolsters the Gallery's Collection

Over the last four decades the Gallery has built the world's finest collection of etchings and illustrated books by the Italian master Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778). The addition of *Two Workmen at Tables* (early 1770s)—with *Fragment of a Lion Bas Relief* (1750s) in verso—further buttresses the Gallery's rank.

Two Workmen at Tables is a superb example of Piranesi's late style. Characterized by bold, dark strokes and broad lines, Piranesi focuses on bodily form and gesture rather than psychology. On the other side of the drawing is a cat that Piranesi drew at least a decade earlier, a feline that resurfaced in his famous *Carceri (Prisons)* series.

It was purchased through the Ahmanson Foundation Fund.

Additional Purchases and Gifts

Through the Max and Heidi Berry Fund, the Gallery acquired *Splinter Beach* (1916), a lithograph by George Bellows (1882–1925) that depicts a group of streetwise kids on a beach overlooking the East River. The purchase of the photograph *Juliet with Peacock Feather and Red Leaf* (1937–38) by Hungarian artist and theorist György Kepes (1906–2001) was made possible through the Pepita Milmore Memorial Fund. The Laughlin Fund made possible the purchases of *Corso Sant' Anastasia with the Palazzo Maffei in Verona* (1855) by William Callow (1812–1908) and *A Moroccan Woman in Traditional Dress* (1866) by Mariano Fortuny (1838–1874).

The Gallery received a generous bequest from Mercedes Eichholz of five paintings, 18 drawings, and six prints by 25 artists, including George Rouault, Pierre Soulages, Juan Gris, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, and Yves Tanguy. The Ratjen Foundation offered a drawing by Ludwig Emil Grimm (1790–1863), the younger brother of the Brothers Grimm, and conservator Ingrid Rose's gift of *Hortus Berolinensis* is a splendid addition to the Gallery's small collection of illustrated German 19th-century botanical books.

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/modern-art-during-renovation.html>.

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at www.twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be

presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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