

FROM ARABBERS TO JEWISH TREASURES

The Baltimore Museum of Art not only brought famous artists to the fore, it focused on community outreach with numerous special exhibitions.

by Jennifer M. Dyer

FOLLOWING ITS 75TH ANNIVERSARY gala year in 1989, The Baltimore Museum of Art focused its attention in 1990 on its internationally-renowned permanent collection for exhibition programming. It also worked on developing innovative, more effective community outreach.

THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

When Miss Etta Cone died in 1949, she left The Baltimore Museum of Art the collection that she and her sister, Dr. Claribel Cone, had assembled during half a century of collecting. The world-renowned Cone Collection includes incomparable works by Henri Matisse, as well as major pieces by Pablo Picasso, Paul Cezanne, Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, Jean-Auguste Renoir, and other masters of early twentieth-century French art.

This collection of approximately 3,000 objects also includes significant works by American artists; hundreds of prints and drawings; illustrated books; textiles, including Oriental rugs; eighteenth and nineteenth century jewelry; decorative arts; objects of African art and adornment; and antique ivories and bronzes.

In addition to the Cone collection, the Museum is also known for its American Wing, which fea-

tures furniture, decorative arts, paintings, twelve miniature rooms, and eight period rooms. In 1925, Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton Owens presented the Museum with its first American Wing accession, a mid-eighteenth-century room from Eltonhead Manor in Calvert County, Maryland. This room was installed in the first Museum building at Monument and Cathedral Streets, and was moved in 1929 to the current site on Art Museum Drive.

Since 1931, seven other period rooms have been added, comprising a sequence of Maryland architectural styles from the early eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. The rooms illustrate the geographical shift of Maryland's cultural center from southern Maryland and the Eastern Shore, where settlement began, to Annapolis, and then, after the Revolutionary War, to Baltimore.

Two other Baltimore Museum of Art collections—The Arts of Africa, the Americas, and Oceania, and The Arts of Asia—represent those cultures from antiquity to the present. An important goal of the Museum is to share with its visitors the meanings of objects showing the powerful links between ourselves and peoples of seemingly distant times and places.

The Museum also houses a selection of Asian art,

eight galleries devoted to contemporary art, eight galleries of works by European Old Masters, and one of this country's finest print and drawing collections. In addition, the Ryda and Robert H. Levi Sculpture Garden and the Alan and Janet Wurtzburger Sculpture Garden include twentieth-century works by artists from Auguste Rodin to Louise Nevelson, providing a beautiful setting where people can enjoy both nature and art.

EXHIBITIONS

Highlights of the BMA's 24 special exhibitions in 1990 ranged from a selection of modern paintings and sculptures from regional collections, to a study of nineteenth-century schoolgirl needlework, to an exhibition of African beadwork. Nearly half of this year's exhibitions were drawn from the Museum's permanent collection.

"BMA Collects: African-American Art," organized in celebration of Black History Month in February, included works by such major figures as Romare Bearden, Robert Colescott, Joshua Johnson, Jacob Lawrence, Joyce Scott, and James Van Der Zee. This exhibition provided a rare opportunity to see many light-restricted works on paper that can only be displayed periodically.

The Museum's eighth annual springtime antiques show, which focused on approachable, affordable collecting, brought together forty dealers representing diverse collecting interests.

From eighteenth-century Boston to nineteenth-century San Antonio, from silver to steer horn, "BMA Collects: Recent Accessions in the Decorative Arts," organized to coincide with The Spring

Antiques Show 1990, featured recently acquired objects of decorative arts which document changing styles and ornamental expression in both America and England.

Thirty-five fine works were on view in "Watercolors and Drawings from the George A. Lucas Collection." This collection, on extended loan to the BMA from The Maryland Institute, College of Art, is well-known for its paintings by Jean Baptiste Camille Corot, Leon Gerome, Camille Pissarro, and others; for its animal sculptures by Barye; and for its holdings of more than 20,000 French nineteenth-century prints. The collection also contains an extraordinary group of about one hundred watercolors and drawings.

European traders and explorers brought glass beads to North America as gifts and trade items. By 1800, glass beads had been incorporated into many existing Native American systems of design and decoration. "A Shared Tradition: Native North American Beadwork" focused on the artistic skill and craftsmanship revealed in stitching and weaving with glass beads on nineteenth and twentieth-century clothing and ornamental objects. The exhibition included objects of Blackfoot, Cheyenne, Lakota (Sioux), and Ojibwe origin.

While cultivating its permanent collections and encouraging visitors to explore these collections' breadth and depth, the Museum continued to bring diverse exhibitions, from local to international, to Baltimore.

Baltimorean Roland Freeman's exhibition, "Roland Freeman: The Arabbers of Baltimore," presented the culmination of a decade of documenting the lives of the Baltimore Arabbers. "Arabber," a folk term peculiar to Baltimore, describes the predominantly Black street vendors who have played a significant role in Baltimore life for many years. In his photographs, Freeman, who grew up in the arabbing tradition, captured a fading custom and a dramatically changing Baltimore. He depicted life in and around the stables, the process of loading and decorating the produce wagons, arabbers' service to the community, and their social and family life.

"Baltimore Collects: Painting and Sculpture Since 1960" demonstrated the recent remarkable growth of local private art collections. For this exhibition, Brenda Richardson, BMA Deputy Director for Art and Curator of Painting and Sculpture, brought together the works of such diverse artists as Morris Louis, Martin Puryear, Sol LeWitt, and Jenny Holzer.

Eighty-four drawings and watercolors by one of the most popular English artists of the Georgian



Alice Neal's "The Mary Bright Commemorative Quilt" was among the works displayed in "Stitching Memories: African-American Story Quilts." PHOTO BY SUSAN RISENDORPH

period were selected for “The Art of Thomas Rowlandson.” Rowlandson (1756-1827) was a versatile, prolific, and highly talented comic artist and acerbic social commentator. His everyday scenes of hunting, boxing, racing, and courting, as well as landscapes and portraits, delighted visitors to the BMA during the summer.

“Stitching Memories: African-American Story Quilts” told stories of African-American artists’ homes and families. More than thirty quilts created by both professional and untrained artists recorded milestones in personal, family, and community histories, documented political events and social movements, and depicted tales from the Bible and African-American literature. Quilts by Baltimore mother and daughter Elizabeth and Joyce Scott figured prominently among the works on display.

“Joel Shapiro: Tracing the Figure” opened its national tour at The Baltimore Museum of Art. Through mere suggestion of the human form, Shapiro’s sculptures express distinctly human gestures, motions, and attitudes. His figures danced in the BMA’s Thalheimer galleries, leaped in the Schaefer courtyard, and strolled about in the exhibition.

“Access to Art: Bringing Folk Art Closer” brought the country’s first major exhibition of touchable folk art to the BMA. Organized by the Museum of American Folk Art, New York, and designed to be accessible to all visitors, in particular the visually impaired, this opportunity to practice the art of aesthetic touch drew many visitors, young and old, disabled and non-disabled.

An exhibition of beadwork by the Ndebele people of South Africa explored the dynamic and colorful designs in the Ndebele’s everyday life. New, multi-colored plastic beads and modern images, such as the airplane and the razor blade, have been incorporated into traditional designs and materials. The richness of these beadwork objects expresses the strong tradition and vitality that have remained deeply rooted despite the practice of apartheid.

The holiday season also brought “Treasures of The Jewish Museum” to the BMA. More than 50 objects of Jewish ritual and cultural significance, along with extensive programming, helped make the religious and cultural aspects of the works accessible for people of all backgrounds. A family day, one of several throughout the year, attracted over 1,000 visitors to see demonstrations, participate in workshops, and enjoy music and theatre.

Presented in conjunction with “Treasures of The Jewish Museum” and drawn from the Museum’s permanent collection, “Chagall’s Exodus” exhibited 30 objects from its holdings of prints and draw-



Roland L. Freeman’s gelatin silver print of Walter “Teeth” Kelly mending wagons at a West Baltimore stable in the summer of 1936 was part of a display on the city’s unique “Arabbers.”

ings by Marc Chagall.

“Lalique: A Century of Glass for a Modern World” presented a major retrospective of 100 years and three generations of glass designed by the French firm of Lalique & Cie. Among the most striking examples on view were the glass table patterned after a cactus and an elegant trophy that evoked the sense of the graceful movement of ice skating.

PROGRAMS

Special programs are an important facet of the Museum’s involvement with the community. Films, lecture series, performances, storytelling, demonstrations, family days, and many other activities bring people from all areas of the country to the Museum.

The Baltimore Film Forum and the Maryland Ballet are housed at the BMA. The on-going “Off the Wall” series, named by *Baltimore Magazine* as “Baltimore’s Best” Performance Art Series for 1990, and “Dance on the Edge,” a 1989 “Baltimore’s Best,” are characteristic of the Museum’s strong and innovative programming.

Thousands of visitors joined the BMA at its gala celebrations during the year. The “Casino Ball on Broadway”—always a sell-out event—featured music, dancing, games, and a raffle.

All guests were entered into the drawing for a trip to the Bahamas at the BMA’s Preakness celebration, “Silks and Saddles: A Maryland Celebration.”

And, in honor of the arts and Halloween, visitors came to this year’s “Le Bal Africain des Beaux Arts” in colorful and exotic African garb.

Each exhibition opening drew more than 1,000 Museum members to socialize while enjoying the BMA’s special exhibitions. The Black History



Marie-Claude Lalique’s “Le Trophee Lalique” was among the works of art in glass displayed in a BMA exhibit of works by the famed Lalique family, on view from November 11, 1990 to January 13, 1991.

experience and appreciation of the arts.

HIGHLIGHTS FOR 1991

The Baltimore Museum of Art is preparing for a major cultural exchange that will feature its Cone Collection at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, while bringing the centerpiece of that museum's collection, a selection of paintings by Impressionist Claude Monet, to Baltimore. "Claude Monet: Impressionist Masterpieces from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston" will be on view at the BMA from October 13, 1991 through January 5, 1992.

"Constructed Images: New Photography by African-American and Latino Artists" (January 29-March 24, 1991) will examine the work of fifteen contemporary artists whose work explores their visions of themselves, social issues, and historical events.

Outstanding examples of portraiture from the Museum's collection will be on view in "Mirror Mirror: The Art of Portraiture" (May 14-August 11, 1991). From Raphael to Renoir, Lipchitz to Warhol, artists and subjects will tell their stories in the paintings and sculptures that are among the best-known and most beloved in the BMA collection.

"Mike and Doug Star" (February 17-April 21, 1991) will present an in-depth examination of the artists' startlingly innovative and poetic work from 1986 to the present. Their cut, torn, glued and taped photographic images have called into question the definition of a photographic print.

"That's All, Folks! Bugs Bunny and Friends Present the Art of Animation" (June 2-August 25, 1991) will celebrate the much-loved Warner Brothers cartoon characters who have delighted children and adults for over 50 years. Drawings, paintings, and cartoon celluloids, presented along with video monitors playing animated cartoons and describing their evolution, trace the development of the cartoon stars, and explore the techniques through which animated films are made.

The Museum was created by and for the community and continues to grow as a result of local contributions. By reaching out to the entire Maryland community and its surrounding areas, The Baltimore Museum of Art encourages people to share in the artistic wealth that they have helped to create. Over 300,000 people visited the museum in 1990, showing the strong public interest in the arts.

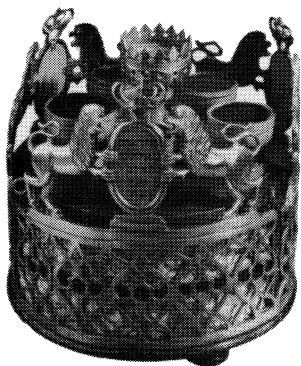


Dr. Schroeder Cherry, the BMA's new Director of Education and Community, with his puppet friends.

PHOTO BY MARILYN VANCE

This tiered Seder Set was among the "Treasures of the Jewish Museum" shown at the BMA.

POLAND, 18TH CENTURY



Month opening reception brought special guest Haywood Rivers back to Baltimore, where he had his first one-man show in 1948. Two of Rivers' paintings were on display in the concurrent exhibition "BMA Collects: African-American Art."

Tours, classes, workshops, and lectures are available to visitors through the Museum's Department of Education and Community. Children can choose from a variety of classes—studying colors and patterns found in the Museum's collections, creating their own African headdresses, or perhaps making "folk art" objects based on a special exhibition. In October, children and adults participated in a Mask Making Workshop to prepare for Le Bal Africain des Beaux Arts.

Singles Sundays and Mini-Courses through the fall, winter, and spring bring adults together for lively discussion of the temporary and permanent exhibitions at the Museum. A new program begun this year presented special opportunities for senior citizens.

Also debuting in 1990 was "Ms. Lily," an African-American puppet designed and made by the BMA's new Director of Education and Community, Dr. Schroeder Cherry. In her role as the Museum's first puppet docent, or tour guide, Ms. Lily delighted adult audiences with her guided tour of the exhibition "Stitching Memories: African-American Story Quilts." Ms. Lily, part of the BMA's programming to reach out in innovative educational programs, will periodically return to lead tours of various exhibitions at the BMA.

Such programs are designed to enrich the visitors'