

Audio Guide Transcript

Catching the Moment

Contemporary Art from the
Ted L. and Maryanne Ellison Simmons
Collection

June 26–September 11, 2022
Main Exhibition Galleries

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM

STOP 1
Taylor Hall
Introduction

Speakers

Min Jung Kim
Barbara B. Taylor Director
Saint Louis Art Museum

Elizabeth Wyckoff
Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs
Saint Louis Art Museum

[Min]

Hello, I am Min Jung Kim, Barbara B. Taylor Director of the Saint Louis Art Museum.

I am delighted to welcome you to the audio guide for *Catching the Moment: Contemporary Art from the Ted L. and Maryanne Ellison Simmons Collection*, an exhibition we've organized to celebrate the acquisition, in 2020, of over 800 works of art from the Simmons collection. This acquisition enhanced and deepened an impressive strength in the Museum's collection—art made in the United States between 1960 and now. The exhibition reflects the distinctive character of the collection, with its emphasis on art that responds to issues that have defined the lives of the collectors. To tell you more, I would like to introduce Elizabeth Wyckoff, curator of prints, drawings, and photographs and one of the cocurators of the exhibition.

[Elizabeth]

Thank you, Min. This exhibition presents a striking and, we hope, a compelling and inspiring survey of art from the last 60 years, mostly prints, drawings, photographs, and sculptures produced in multiple, made predominantly in the United States. Included are successive generations of artists whose work is in dialogue with contemporary culture and politics as well as art history. The earliest generation came of age during World War II, while many of the core artists from the next generation, like the Simmonses, were impacted by that war's immediate aftermath and the Vietnam War. You will see work by artists who were deeply affected by the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s. Many of the artists address colonialism, racism, and other issues in ways that encourage us to pause and consider our personal and collective histories.

Catching the Moment marks an important milestone for the Saint Louis Art Museum. Of the 43 artists in this acquisition, 25 are completely new to the collection, and the works add many new themes to the myriad stories we can tell. These artworks create further opportunities to connect with and reframe the Museum's expansive collection, which draws from across the globe over thousands of years.

The exhibition is a collaborative effort, and I would like to acknowledge my co-curators, Andrea Ferber, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellow for Prints, Drawings, and Photographs; and Clare Kobasa, assistant curator in prints, drawings, and photographs. We had crucial assistance from associate paper conservator Sophie Barbisan. Maryanne Ellison Simmons and Ted L. Simmons have been unfailingly generous throughout the process. I encourage you to tune in to hear from all of us—including the Simmonses and others in this audio guide.

STOP 2

Bodies and Souls

Untitled (Face in Dirt)

Speaker

David Kiehl

Curator Emeritus of Prints

Whitney Museum of American Art

I'm David Kiehl, Curator Emeritus of Prints at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

David was an incredible person. He was self-taught—an artist and also a writer. His artwork captures the spirit of that particular time in New York. He was very close to Peter Hujar, who is also in the exhibition. David referred to Peter as his mentor, his lover, his father, his brother—that person who really told him to get his act together. And they became very close. When Peter died of AIDS in 1988, David was with him in the hospital room. Just before Peter died, David was diagnosed with AIDS, and he didn't let it stop him. In fact, his work became much more vocal about what it is to be living with the disease and also just letting people know that you don't lose your humanity if you're sick.

David loved to travel. This was in May 1991, in the Chaco Canyon area. He's basically staged his—what he considered his last self-portrait. Seven or eight months later, David is dead. I like to think of David at this point, not as looking forward to death, but doing his last will and testament to us.

And for that, I want to read something on a photograph that he did in 1990, a year before this photograph was taken, of his self-portrait. This is a photographic detail of a little bug that he caught on one of these road trips. He's holding it in his hand. And he's saying: What is this little guy's job in the world? If this little guy dies, does the world know? Does the world feel this? Does something get displaced? If this little guy dies, does the world get a little lighter? . . . He keeps going on. Basically, he's saying: Do something. You believe in something, act. And he's saying: What is your job in this world? I may be gone, but I'm telling you, you've got to do something.

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Bodies and Souls

Pool of Tears II (after Lewis Carroll) (Part 1)

Speaker

Andrea Ferber

**Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellow for Prints, Drawings, and
Photographs**

Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, I am Andrea Ferber, the Andrew W. Mellon Fellow for Prints, Drawings, and Photographs at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

Kiki Smith frequently portrays archetypal females, especially adolescents such as Alice, Little Red Riding Hood, and Sleeping Beauty as well as the biblical Eve and Mary Magdalene. These girls and women are initially naive and innocent, but when made vulnerable during a traumatic experience, prove resilient enough to become wiser and more mature in the end. Kiki Smith often shows these protagonists during moments of peril or humility—when she feels most weak but is actually demonstrating her strength.

To learn about the etching-printmaking process, listen to the track by my colleague Sophie Barbisan.

STOP 4

Bodies and Souls

Pool of Tears II (after Lewis Carroll) (Part 1)

Speaker

Sophie Barbisan

Associate Paper Conservator

Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, my name is Sophie Barbisan, and I'm the associate paper conservator for the Saint Louis Art Museum.

As a conservator, part of my job consists in understanding how a work of art is created. *Pool of Tears* demonstrates Kiki Smith's mastery of hard-ground etching. This technique employs the following steps: a varnish is applied to a metal plate, then drawn through with an etching needle. It is then submerged into an acid bath, which incises, or bites, the lines into the exposed metal. The plate is finally inked and run through the press, which transfers the ink to paper.

As you can imagine, the copper plate used in *Pool of Tears* was quite large. It was actually the largest that the publisher, Universal Limited Art Editions, could accommodate on their press. Smith employed step etching, which involves repeating biting and stopping-out procedures to achieve different thicknesses in line. Notice the pattern of the monkey's fur: the stippling marks were left in the acid longer than the delicate line work to create larger, fuzzy dots. A flat bite technique was also used to obtain a darker outline around the animals. The figures were protected with a stop-out varnish, with only the water area exposed and placed in the acid. The accumulation of ink along the edges of the shape gives us the illusion that the animals are swimming in water.

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Bodies and Souls

Candy Darling on Her Deathbed (Part 1)

Speaker

Eric Lutz

Associate Curator of Photography

Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, this is Eric Lutz, associate curator of photography at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

I'd like to talk about one of Peter Hujar's most iconic images, *Candy Darling on Her Deathbed*. It shows the transgender actress in a New York City hospital, dying of lymphoma at the tragically young age of 29. Candy Darling was made famous by her appearance in several Andy Warhol films. For Hujar's portrait she is shown reclining in her hospital bed. While the setting itself is quite ordinary, even off-putting, it is transformed into something quite theatrical through Candy Darling's makeup and pose, the arrangement of flowers, and Hujar's masterful composition and handling of photographic tone.

Hujar moves the viewer's attention between expressive contrasts of light and dark—the shadowed room, Darling's white, caked makeup and platinum-blond wig, her silky black shirt playing off the crumpled white hospital sheets, the lush, bright chrysanthemums and the withering black roses, which draw attention to the opposite sides in the cycle of life.

It is a surprisingly complicated image, both visually and emotionally. At turns it seduces with its beauty—Candy Darling's languid, vampish pose evokes a kind of Hollywood glamour, but it is underpinned by a profound sense of the fleetingness of life. With her face heavily made-up, the darkness of Darling's eyes and her pale white skin rendered in black and white almost yields the appearance of a skull. They are not so much looking out at the viewer as pulling the viewer inward, towards a recognition of their own mortality. In their unique collaboration, Peter Hujar and Candy Darling allow us to recognize how closely life and death may coexist.

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Bodies and Souls

Candy Darling on Her Deathbed (Part 2)

Speaker

Maryanne Ellison Simmons

Artist and Collaborative Printer

Saint Louis, Missouri

The beginnings of our collection, of course, began with Kiki Smith. And the early advice that we received was “collect in our generation” but also to choose an artist and then follow that artist’s colleagues and contemporaries. And we began to follow Kiki’s contemporaries early on in the collection, and one of them was Peter Hujar. And among other photographs in our small but I think powerful Hujar collection is *Candy Darling*. Candy Darling was a trans woman. She was Andy Warhol’s movie screen star, and she was dying. It’s early in the ’70s. She is in a hospital, and she has requested Peter Hujar to come and photograph her one last time. And Peter, being the consummate photographer, brought a cast of characters—among them a stylist, a florist, set designers, lighting crew—and created this amazing black and white and beautiful tones of gray and probably as a wonderful last photograph that Candy Darling could have imagined.

I often say about this work that you don’t need words to describe some art, and this is a case in point. As you see, initially, this beautiful woman, you begin to realize where she is—the hospital light, the hospital bed, the hospital tray, and then you realize not all is right here. But it is one of the great photographs by Peter Hujar. And 20 years later, the AIDS epidemic would bring even more meaning to this as Peter would die, and his colleagues Paul Thek and David Wojnarowicz would also die of AIDS. It also speaks to this amazing community in New York City and internationally of people supporting each other, which I think is a really powerful message as well.

STOP 7

Metamorphosis

Steindruck München Series (Part 1)

Speaker

Andrea Ferber

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellow for Prints, Drawings, and

Photographs

Saint Louis Art Museum

Michael Barnes's imagery might make you think of fantastical Surrealist landscapes and scenes such as those by Spanish artist Salvador Dalí. The figures and objects derive from real life, but are altered enough to indicate they are not real—like a dreamscape. Michael Barnes made this series in Germany, and some of the vignettes refer to his experiences during that visit. *On the Road to Bremen* depicts an alternative ending to the Grimm brothers' fairy tale "The Bremen Town Musicians," in which four hybrid creatures lounge outside the cabin they stormed. The bag of skulls in *A Delicate Balance* refers to French catacombs the artist saw. Many aspects of Michael Barnes's imaginary scenes are left up to the viewer's interpretation. What narratives do you see?

To learn about the lithography printmaking process, listen to the track by my colleague Sophie Barbisan.

STOP 8

Metamorphosis

Steindruck München Series (Part 2)

Speaker

Sophie Barbisan

Associate Paper Conservator

Saint Louis Art Museum

Michael Barnes is an avid proponent of stone lithography, which is apparent in his *Steindruck München* series. The technique is traditionally done on limestone using an oily material such as lithographic crayon. The exposed areas are etched, which enables them to retain water. When an oil-based ink is applied, it is repelled by the water and sticks to the design. In contemporary lithography metal plates have mostly replaced limestone, ever since aluminum became readily available, along with the invention of photolithography.

Barnes drew his key images directly on the stones with a lithographic crayon and printed them in black ink during his residency in Germany. Once he returned to the United States, he worked on adding the colors with photolithographic aluminum plates. For *On the Road to Bremen*, the artist created six additional plates, one for each color. Barnes prints translucent colors thanks to ink modifiers. He begins with the warmer tones, such as ochers and browns, and then proceeds with the cooler ones. The artist is choosing here to build transparent layers, responding to what he sees, instead of selecting colors ahead of time.

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Metamorphosis

The Garden and the Guardian

Speaker

Damon Davis

Artist

Saint Louis, Missouri

Hello, my name is Damon Davis, and I'm a postdisciplinary artist living in Saint Louis, Missouri.

The Garden and the Guardian is a piece from my body of work *Darker Gods*. *Darker Gods* is a trilogy, an ever-growing Afro-Surrealist mythology that I have created to tease out what Blackness is, in relation to the zeitgeist of American culture. I use tropes and Black cultural norms that are their own myths and rearrange, negate, or accentuate them to a level of deity. I then take these deities that together form a new pantheon and create parables that express ideas I have around what the Black American experience has been for me.

In this piece we see O Ti O Tan, the trembling giant, who is my interpretation of Mother Earth. She has eyes of diamonds and teeth of gold, and upon her back is an aspen grove where the garden of low-hanging heavens sits, a sacred garden that the gods inhabit. The garden is also a gateway between the world we live in and the world of the gods. And O Ti O Tan is the guardian of this gateway and the garden itself. In this way she embodies the parallels and intersections between femininity and earth, and that she is not only the sacred garden itself, but she is the guardian of that garden. In that, this work is a visual parable about self-reliance as well as our relationship to the planet we inhabit.

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Enrique Chagoya: Inverting Worlds

La-K-La-K

Speaker

Ted L. Simmons

Hall of Fame Baseball Player

Saint Louis, Missouri

The title of the drawing *La-K-La-K* is a sound that mimics the Mexican slang word for skeleton, *calaca*. In Mexico *La-K-La-K* is pronounced la-ka la-ka. The *calacas* are associated with Day of the Dead. Newspapers in Mexico usually publish on November 2 satirical prose with fictitious deaths of famous people that are still alive with an illustrated portrait of the person being satirized as a skeleton or as a *calaca*. So, the title of the drawing is an abbreviation for the sound in Spanish of *la calaca*—the skeletons, the bones.

The Enrique Chagoya prints you see in our collection are often full of tiny details, read like Mayan codices, and unfold over the span of the work. *La-K-La-K*, a monumental charcoal drawing from 1986, is explicit in its use of two simple images—the iconic Posada Calavera and her colonial hat, and the also iconic but small American Mickey Mouse. *La-K-La-K* captures one of the main themes of Enrique's work: by aspiring to greener pastures, one risks losing their own cultural identity.

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Enrique Chagoya: Inverting Worlds

The Marriage of St. Catherine

Speaker

Clare Kobasa

Assistant Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs

Saint Louis Art Museum

Where to look first? At the toothy skull emblazoned *La Santa*, the saint? At the oversized diamond ring almost glinting in the corner of the image? Or at what lies beneath—an elaborately engraved copy of a painting by the 17th-century Flemish painter Anthony van Dyck, whose biography, translated into Spanish, begins on the next page: “*era hijo de un comerciante, nacio en Amberes*” (son of a merchant, born in Antwerp).

Enrique Chagoya’s work often startles; a viewer encounters the unexpected only to immediately turn the question back in on itself—what, exactly, should we expect? His seemingly humorous interventions contrast with the hierarchies proposed by the printed image and text beneath them, bearers of the officially sanctioned histories of art that Chagoya has engaged with. Here he interrupts them to confound the privileging of not only the subject matter but also the medium through which it is communicated. A two-page spread from the Spanish translation of an English text promising a Gallery of Masterpieces is thus transformed into a master class of critical engagement, where threads of religion and exchange are retold in an evocative register of doodles, thoughts expressed on the surface of a sheet whose imperiousness deflates in the face of laughter.

STOP 12

Enrique Chagoya: Inverting Worlds

El Regreso del Caníbal Macrobiótico

Speaker

Enrique Chagoya

Artist

San Francisco, California

Hello, this is Enrique Chagoya, artist.

I created this pre-Columbian style–inspired accordion book titled *El Regreso del Caníbal Macrobiótico*, or *The return of the macrobiotic cannibal*, in 1998. It was influenced by my research on the tragic destruction of almost all the pre-Columbian books from the cultures of Meso-America during the conquest of Mexico between 1519 and 1521.

Only about two dozen pre-Columbian books survived the conquest war: 4 Mayan, about 19 Mixtec-Zapotec, and possibly 1 Aztec book, *Codex Borbónico*. Also, there are many postconquest Indigenous books and documents done immediately after the conquest war. They are raw material for my codices. This codex reads from right to left and uses the Mayan numeral system for page numbers.

Like in most of my books, here I try to use a visual language where popular icons from different cultural origins are presented with humor and are placed in contradictory and unexpected interactions with each other. I hope the multilinear narrative and sense of humor can open the work to other interpretations beyond my own. Depending on the viewer's own background, it may be read in different ways and hopefully engages the imagination by participating in a narrative.

In my concept, I imagine how pre-Columbian artists could have described the contemporary cultural clashes from their ancient perspective if they had traveled in time. My codices are a humble attempt to answer such questions.

This book combines woodcut, color lithography, and chine collé on handmade amate paper—a traditional paper currently handmade by Otomi Indigenous people in Mexico, from the bark of the native amate tree, a relative of the fig tree. It has been printed in 16 colors in an edition of 30, plus proofs, from one woodblock and nine aluminum plates. It was published by Shark's Ink in Colorado.

STOP 13

Pay Attention

BOMBHEAD (Part 1)

Speaker

Elizabeth Wyckoff

Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs

Saint Louis Art Museum

By his own description, Bruce Conner was, and I quote, “an artist, anti-artist, . . . beatnik, hippie, punk, subtle, confrontational, believable, paranoiac, courteous, difficult, . . . precise, calm, contrary, elusive, spiritual, profane, a Renaissance man of contemporary art.” To call him iconoclastic would be an understatement.

BOMBHEAD was one of many times Connor appropriated the United States military's photographs that recorded the 1946 nuclear test explosions in the Pacific. It's a good example of both his shape-shifting and his adaptability. A digital print from 2002, it shows him reaching out to the latest new technology. He was already a master at manipulating analog film as well as all manner of other found materials—furniture, tchotchkes, nylon stockings, and newspaper clippings—into art. Still, for *BOMBHEAD*, he didn't leave it at just scanning and manipulating the mushroom cloud and the portrait of himself in military uniform. In a typically Connor formulation, he accidentally hand-painted, quote, unquote, “a small red drop of acrylic paint on the tie pin.”

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Pay Attention

BOMBHEAD (Part 2)

Speaker

Ted L. Simmons

Hall of Fame Baseball Player

Saint Louis, Missouri

Conner, a San Francisco transplant from Kansas, is best known for his sculptural assemblages and short films that track the underbelly of America. His films of the '50s and '60s often used images of the nuclear bomb tests so ever present on our televisions during the Cold War. He acquired the film of the Marshall Islands nuclear tests from the National Archives and set them to popular music. Connor is credited with the introduction of pop music in contemporary film—*Easy Rider*. In 1989 Conner created a small collage *BOMBHEAD*. In 2002 Conner and Don Farnsworth at Magnolia Editions in Oakland, California, digitally manipulated that original image to create the edition *BOMBHEAD* seen here.

STOP 15

Pay Attention

Celebrate 40,000 Years of American Art

Speaker

Andrea Ferber

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellow for Prints, Drawings, and

Photographs

Saint Louis Art Museum

While the United States was established as a nation in 1776, the cultural and social histories of this continent date back tens of thousands of years. Native American artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith acknowledges the ancient cultures of the Americas by reproducing images from petroglyphs.

The rabbit is a Trickster character in many Indigenous cultures, at once intelligent, mischievous, and funny. The artist explains: “Tricksterism can be part of making art, writing, or doing theater. The creator, inventor, or satirist shows the flip side of things. Wile E. Coyote and Bugs Bunny are surely taken from our traditional Native American creation and teaching stories. They mock greediness, failures, shortcomings, and narcissism—the foibles of human life.”

STOP 16

Pay Attention

Pay Attention

Speaker

Maryanne Ellison Simmons

Artist and Collaborative Printer

Saint Louis, Missouri

My favorite print in our collection is *Pay Attention* by Bruce Nauman. There's a happy coincidence in that the first plate in the catalog for this show is Kiki Smith's *Black Flag*, and it's Ted's favorite piece in our collection. And he had always said that that was his favorite piece. And I always wondered why, and thinking about this collection, I think I know why: it's the beginning of life. And if you fast-forward—my favorite piece, Bruce Nauman's *Pay Attention*—and between the beginning of life and this rather stark, in-your-face admonition to pay attention is really the story of this collection. We like to think of it as a cross section of our life's experiences.

We always say that we like things that say something. In the case of the Nauman, Nauman uses words. Sometimes it's just marks on paper, to indicate that the words don't have that much strength. But often the words mean an awful lot, as in this print. When he's asking us to pay attention, he's not asking us politely; he's asking us with some sort of force that is easily recognized. He's now coming right at you. The imagery is backwards, and to a printmaker who's used to reading backwards, it's immediate, but those who aren't used to doing such a thing, the awareness is sudden. It's there for a purpose. There are things in all of our lives to which we need to pay attention. It's the centerpiece of this collection for me, and I hope you understand that it is a warning, a cause to be aware of all of the things that will come at you in your life in such speed that you need to be aware of each and every moment.

STOP 17

Abstraction

Savage Breeze

Speaker

Clare Kobasa

Assistant Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs

Saint Louis Art Museum

Helen Frankenthaler's 1974 woodcut *Savage Breeze* corrals swaths of bright color into graphic shapes bearing the marks of tools and the patterning of the wood that served as a matrix. Frankenthaler collaborated with printers to make both lithographs and woodcuts at Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE), a fine art print publisher founded in 1957 that spurred a transformative rise in printmaking as part of contemporary artistic practice.

This print began as a piece of plywood that was cut into several shapes using a jigsaw before being inked and reassembled to produce the work seen here. The colors bump up against each other, where the artificially introduced seams dance against the pattern of the wood grain visible through the ink. Late into what she described as the challenging process of making this woodcut, Frankenthaler landed on whitewashing the sheet and then layering the other colors on top. The white peeks out in the driplike shape that lands just below the zone of intense green at the top of the woodcut.

Frankenthaler's approach to paint on canvas—letting the poured liquid medium soak into unprimed fabric—resulted in luminous, organic shapes that seem to both contain and expand with the natural forces invited into their making. Similarly, this woodcut's title—*Savage Breeze*—invites the viewer to think about the forces at work in the making of this print and to interpret the piece in an environmental key, one of perhaps unexpected intensity.

STOP 18

Tom Huck's Rural Satire

Snacktime Marcy

Speakers

Ted L. Simmons

Hall of Fame Baseball Player

Saint Louis, Missouri

Tom Huck

Artist

Saint Louis, Missouri

[Ted]

My name is Ted Simmons.

[Tom]

My name is Tom Huck. I'm an artist, printmaker, and I own and operate and publish my prints through Evil Prints in southern Missouri.

[Ted]

There was a doll out there that one of the companies, you know, produced. And it was this doll that had a mouth that actually moved and, like, chewed.

[Tom]

It was the Snacktime Cabbage Patch doll.

[Ted]

Yeah, and they got this girl's hair caught in it, and the doll chewed up to its head, and the whole place went nuts.

[Tom]

Yeah, I made that whole triptych, *Snacktime Marcy*.

[Ted]

I mean, how related is this?

[Tom]

I feel like in my work, I'm making the existence of these bad decisions last and are able to be contemplated at a future date. That's what *Snacktime Marcy* is all about, is bad ideas and bad toys.

[Ted]

What is going on: block one, block two, block three?

[Tom]

Snacktime Marcy is my first foray into large-scale printing. I can say directly that all three of those blocks were inspired and influenced by Max Beckmann, the way that he set up space. And everyone knows that the Saint Louis Art Museum has the best collection of Max Beckmanns in the world. And I saw those prints from the time I was 13. Not print—the paintings, and his prints too, but the paintings were what I was really thinking about when I did the *Snacktime Marcy* series. Now part one is called *Snacktime Marcy Birthday Boy*, and that's a birthday party where a kid is celebrating the arrival of his gift, which is a Snacktime Marcy doll, and things haven't quite gone wrong yet.

And block two—block two is called *Marcy's Revolt*. And that is the unboxing or escape of the dolls at the factory, and it's just wreaking havoc. And it has a woman's hair, and it's chewing the hair. So, they came with a motorized throat and mouth that automatically shut off with a plastic french fry that came along with the dolls. But they didn't think—it shuts off at the end of the french fry, which is four inches long. Well, if a kid's hair gets in there, it shuts off at the scalp—

[Ted]

Got it!

[Tom]

Which is why it was recalled. Okay? Now, sometimes these things are just too easy. It's not like I was sitting around thinking of a visual code and how to get this across to my viewer.

[Ted]

No, that's pretty simple.

[Tom]

A doll attached to a kid's scalp is a pretty strong visual. I went—I did it literally, visually right there. The border of block two is all the doll heads, and those are antique doll heads. I've always been creeped out by antique doll heads. Now part three is *Burn and Kill*. And the only way that you could kill Snacktime Marcy, the doll, was to burn it and

kill it. And the people are riding around in these toy cars that were, you know, pedal cars from the '50s. You'll see those; I think Radio Flyer made them. It was a brand in the '50s, '60s. It's continuing this idea of toys, bad toy ideas gone awry. The imagery that's in block three from the *Snacktime Marcy* are those cars catching on fire, and people riding around trying to get rid and eradicate the dolls that have wreaked havoc on society and children's scalps all over the world.

STOP 19
Borrow, Transform, Repeat
Kansas Samurai (Part 1)

Speaker

Philip Hu
Curator of Asian Art
Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, I'm Philip Hu, curator of Asian art at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

Many contemporary artists address the complexities of identity in their work—especially when their experience differs from those around them. As a three-year-old, Seattle-born Roger Shimomura and his family were among thousands of Japanese Americans who were forcibly relocated. They were sent to so-called internment camps after the United States entered the Pacific theatre of World War II in 1942. Despite being born, raised, and educated in the United States, he is often asked where he is from, and partly in response to that, early in his career he began merging American and Japanese culture in his art.

Initially, Shimomura felt out of place when he moved to the rural Midwest to teach at the University of Kansas. Of this print, the artist has stated: “My move to Kansas in 1970 underscored my ethnic and cultural difference from the local populace and soon inspired a new direction in my artwork. The images in *Kansas Samurai* are meant to metaphorically represent that sense of rejection that can be experienced by those who are not members of the majority culture.”

To learn about Shimomura's printmaking process, listen to the track by my colleague Sophie Barbisan.

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Borrow, Transform, Repeat

Kansas Samurai (Part 2)

Speaker

Sophie Barbisan

Associate Paper Conservator

Saint Louis Art Museum

The lithographs of Roger Shimomura show an intended flatness, close in appearance to screen prints. This has led to confusion and misidentification of Shimomura's lithographs. *Kansas Samurai*, for example, is a seven-color lithograph that was printed at the Lawrence Lithography Workshop. The artist provided the key image in the form of a cartoon, which was reproduced on a transparent film and used to expose a photolithographic aluminum plate. These solid colors were obtained by the use of opaque tusche when creating the films and the plates. The influence of Japanese woodblock prints on Shimomura is referenced not only in the imagery used but also in the background of *Kansas Samurai*. The wood grain was reproduced by inking wood, transferring the grain onto a film, then exposing a plate with it.

The order of printing can be challenging to visually identify, and it is not always documented by publishers. In the case of *Kansas Samurai*, certain inks were layered on top of each other to create new tones. For example, the guard of the sword was created by layering three colors: first blue, followed by a red to obtain a dark maroon; the purple highlight was achieved by adding a light, transparent gray.

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Borrow, Transform, Repeat

Spells and Incantations

Speakers

Elizabeth Wyckoff

Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs

Saint Louis Art Museum

Lindsey Schifko

Learning and Engagement Assistant

Saint Louis Art Museum

[Elizabeth]

Hello, I'm Elizabeth Wyckoff.

[Lindsey]

I'm Lindsey Schifko, Learning and Engagement assistant and specialist in ancient Egyptian art. We are going to explore some of the ways this unusual print by Jane Hammond makes connections with the Museum's ancient Egyptian collection.

[Elizabeth]

On one level, Hammond's *Spells and Incantations* borrows from the artist's personal memories of her grandmother—a woman who had spent much of her own childhood in Egypt and who was also the strongest artistic influence as Hammond was growing up. But this unusual, three-dimensional print is more than a simple family reminiscence: Hammond has assembled her own visual lexicon—a sort of pictorial alphabet made up of 276 image types that she has culled from old books and printed matter of all kinds.

Lindsey, how would you compare Jane Hammond's visual language in this work with the hieroglyphs that we see on Egyptian coffins?

[Lindsey]

I notice that Hammond's hieroglyphs are a mix of ancient and modern symbols and imagery. Some are Egyptian, but they also come from other cultures. In terms of the Egyptian ones, I can see silhouettes of various gods and goddesses and also phonetic or sound signs from the hieroglyphic alphabet. Hammond created her own inscription using symbols we recognize but also some we don't. If you try to read it as if it were actually a hieroglyphic text, it comes out as gibberish, but maybe for Hammond, it acts like a spell or incantation—that is what the title of the work suggests to me.

[Elizabeth]

That's intriguing, to think about how the connection between how Egyptian hieroglyphs work together to form a language and then how Hammond uses her own lexicon, which I think tends to be more abstract. I can see that here. She may well have been trying to create, well, maybe it's the illusion of a textual statement.

What other connections could you point out to visitors who might want to explore Egyptian art after experiencing this work?

[Lindsey]

First of all, we have three coffins on view here at the Museum. Two are male priests and not pharaohs, like the style of Hammond's coffin. The other is on loan from Washington University in St. Louis and is an elite female who worked in a temple. Two of the coffins have gilding like Hammond's. In ancient Egypt gold was a symbol of wealth and prestige. The Egyptians believed that the precious metal was the "skin of the gods."

[Elizabeth]

I can just mention here that actual gold leaf was used to create the gilding in Hammond's print coffin. I also want to say just how unusual this object is: Hammond worked with the Colorado-based printer publisher Bud Shark to create an incredibly complex print using multiple, layered techniques, and it was then cut and assembled into this 3D object.

[Lindsey]

I think it is important to notice that Hammond has avoided the original purpose of an Egyptian coffin, which is to preserve the body of the deceased for the afterlife. Instead, she calls her coffin "an amulet for propitious things." Rather than a symbol of death, her 21st-century coffin becomes a mystical object for good luck.

I can see that she has borrowed several details from her Egyptian models, even if their meaning changes in her hands. She wears the formal headdress of a pharaoh, called a *nemes*. This is a cloth covering that is often striped with two lappets falling down the shoulders. And at her brow is a rearing cobra, or uraeus, ready to strike or spit at the pharaoh's enemies. The cobra is representative of Wadjet, the protective snake goddess of Lower, or northern, Egypt.

[Elizabeth]

The cobra is one of two added elements attached to the 3D print. The other is in her hands. What is she holding?

[Lindsey]

In her crossed hands she holds a striped crook and flail. This regalia was reserved for the coffins of Egyptian kings, and are symbols of power and authority. Osiris, lord of the underworld, is traditionally portrayed grasping the crook and flail.

[Elizabeth]

Lindsey, thank you so much for sharing your knowledge of the Museum's Egyptian collection. This is just one of many, many examples of the ways that artists look back at art history and find ways to adapt that history to tell their own contemporary stories.