

Audio Guide Transcript

New_{to}
the Museum
Prints, Drawings, & Photographs

April 14–July 9, 2023
Gallery 235 and the Sidney S. and Sadie M. Cohen
Gallery 234

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM

STOP 1

Sidney S. and Sadie M. Cohen Gallery 234

Introduction

Speaker

Eric Lutz

Associate Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs

Saint Louis Art Museum

Welcome to *New to the Museum: Prints, Drawings and Photographs*. My name is Eric Lutz, and I'm a cocurator of the project, along with Elizabeth Wyckoff and Clare Kobasa.

This exhibition features recent acquisitions of works on paper to the Museum. In these two adjoining galleries, you will encounter over 60 never-before-displayed prints, photographs, and drawings. They cover a wonderfully broad range of art media and cultures and span from the 16th century all the way up to the present day. These works are arranged in groupings and juxtapositions that are meant to highlight their variety and allow for a process of discovery as you move from one work to the next.

The accompanying wall labels provide context and illuminate fascinating backstories about how the works came to the Museum. In addition, these works feature audio commentaries, each with different speakers, that provide additional perspectives on the artworks. We hope you enjoy *New to the Museum*.

STOP 2

Sidney S. and Sadie M. Cohen Gallery 234

To Sit (with Pochoir)

Speakers

Clare Kobasa

**Assistant Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs
Saint Louis Art Museum**

Nichole N. Bridges

**Morton D. May Curator of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas,
and Curator of African Art
Saint Louis Art Museum**

[Clare]

Hello, I'm Clare Kobasa, the assistant curator of prints, drawings, and photographs.

Hi, I'm Nichole Bridges, Morton D. May Curator of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, and curator of African art.

Emma Amos's print *To Sit (with Pochoir)* is a remarkable example of the artist's use of a whole variety of different mediums and her experimentation in practices of printmaking. If you look closely, you'll notice that it's composed of a plate that's been trimmed right down the center, and then a stencil has been used to add color. And the background evokes the African textiles that Amos herself collected. In thinking about some of these practices of fragmentation and recomposition and the ways that collage played a role in her wider practice, [it's] wonderful to have Nichole, our curator of African art, to talk a bit about the place and the role of textiles in Amos's art and collecting.

[Nichole]

What really stands out for me, from the point of view of African art, is this use of a textile. I would say it's in the background, but really it has a tremendous presence, on almost equal ground with the figures.

The textile that appears on this print reminds me of a West African resist-dyed cloth. And a resist dye is simply the technique where an artist uses some sort of material, like a

wax or cassava paste, to paint a pattern onto cloth. And then the cloth gets dyed in a dye bath, and the segments that have been covered with the resist substance remain undyed. And so, I think that's what you're seeing here, is an interpretation of a resist-dyed cloth with these wavy lines or zigzags. And there's even the suggestion of kind of crackling in the white segments, or the unprinted segments, that remind me of batik. And we do have in our collection here in the Museum a number of resist-dyed West African textiles from this period from different parts of West Africa, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Nigeria, and this textile resonates with some of those.

I've always admired Emma Amos's incorporation of African textiles into her works. And although she didn't travel extensively in Africa, she was based for many, many decades of her career in the New York City metro area, which meant that she had access to a large range of African textiles that were accessible in the marketplace. Some popular places to acquire these textiles might be in Harlem on 116th Street, but in lots of other parts of the city, and in New Jersey in the metro area where she lived, thanks to large communities of West African merchants and traders and migrants living in the area.

[Clare]

I love what you were saying about the way in which it's not really the background of the print. It's very much a part of it. And Amos herself was a weaver and a textile artist. And so, I think that also speaks to her recognition of textile as a sort of fundamental, crucial visual element in this print, and then it's wonderful to see it play out in other elements of her work as well.

STOP 3

Sidney S. and Sadie M. Cohen Gallery 234

New Suite of Notebooks of Chinese Designs for the Use of Designers and Painters

Speaker

Genny Cortinovis

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts and Design

Saint Louis Art Museum

I'm Genny Cortinovis, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts and Design at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

In 1796 Jean Pillement was in a tough place, both professionally and financially. He had moved to a small town in southern France to lie low during the tumultuous years of the French Revolution. Few wealthy patrons were around to buy his paintings. Lyon's Grande fabrique, for which he had supplied textile designs, had been shuttered, and his native city had lost nearly a third of its population, including many of its craftspeople. However, he and his longtime collaborator and companion, Anne Allen, did see a potential solution to their financial woes in his decorative prints, which had first found fame in London in the 1750s.

For some three decades, Pillement's novel flowers and fanciful scenes of an imagined Asia continued to appear on painted and transfer-printed ceramics, furniture, metalwork, woven and printed textiles, tapestry, wallpaper, and embroidery.

Leaning into this previous success, Pillement and Allen created a series of cahiers, or small portfolios, consisting of a title page and four etchings, all in color. The first—of nine in total—featured flowers, *Fleurs idéal*. This example belongs to the second suite, aimed at draftsmen and painters. The jewellike colors were achieved using a new technique called à la poupee, a painstaking process. Up to six colors were applied to the plate for a single polychrome impression. Pillement's decorative designs were widely published, but they were often so badly adapted they lost their delicacy. Allen's masterful engravings breathed new life into the work of the aging artist.

Pillement first met Anne Allen, a talented miniaturist and engraver, during a trip to

London in the late 1770s. Allen quickly got a taste of Pillement's wanderlust, following him first to Avignon in France, then Portugal, and back to France, finally settling in Lyon. Over his lifetime, Pillement traveled to an impressive number of European countries, including Spain, England, Holland, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, and Poland. One place he never went was Asia, and so, unlike his carefully observed landscapes, designs like this one remained firmly a fantasy.

STOP 4

Sidney S. and Sadie M. Cohen Gallery 234

A Man in a Turban, Seen from Behind

Speakers

Judy Mann

Senior Curator of European Art to 1800

Saint Louis Art Museum

Elizabeth Wyckoff

Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs

Saint Louis Art Museum

[Judy]

Hello, I'm Judy Mann, senior curator of European art to 1800 at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

When the Museum purchased this beautiful red chalk drawing by Giambattista Tiepolo, I was especially excited since it related to *The Crucifixion*, one of my favorite paintings in the Museum—the work of Giambattista and his son Giandomenico. I have always admired the dynamism of the composition—the power of the charging horse, the varied orientations of the three crucifixes, and the dramatic lighting, where darkness moves in from the right, threatening to overwhelm the bright sky. The turbaned figure on the left serves as a framing device for the scene; its rich red drapery adds additional vibrancy.

What excited me most in acquiring the drawing was having the chance to show the artist's thinking as he composed the figure, working out the specifics of part of the drapery at the top of the sheet.

[Elizabeth]

I'm Elizabeth Wyckoff, curator of prints, drawings, and photographs at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

I was taken by Tiepolo's expressive use of red and white chalk. I was also fascinated to learn that he and his sons preserved thousands of their drawings, assembling them in albums that remained in the artists' studio for decades. This drawing is one of 262 red and black chalk drawings from one of those albums that was acquired by the German artist Johann Dominik Bossi, perhaps directly from the Tiepolo family. Bossi's daughter

inherited the drawings, and her heirs sold them in 1882, by which time they were no longer bound together in an album.

If you look closely at the bottom of the sheet, you will see splotches of brown ink bleeding through from the back side. These are the inventory number (3,023) and its monetary value (four Austrian kreuzers), presumably added in the Tiepolo studio.

STOP 5

Sidney S. and Sadie M. Cohen Gallery 234

Highlands

Speaker

Ellen McCaffrey

Docent

Saint Louis Art Museum

Hi, I'm Ellen. I'm a docent at the Saint Louis Art Museum, and I used to visit the Forest Park Highlands when I was a kid.

On Oakland Avenue, parallel to highway 64/40, just past the Hampton overpass entrance to Forest Park, stands a curved building. The building's unusual shape pays homage to what once occupied that space: the Forest Park Highlands amusement park. Specifically, the curve imitates the movement and the design of the Comet roller coaster that rambled there. Artist Leslie J. Laskey captured the power and drama of the roller coaster curves in the bold lines of his woodcuts. The crisscrossed lines on the woodcut suggest the sound of the wood shaking as the cars rolled.

I am reminded of grade school picnics I attended at the Forest Park Highlands when I was a child. Gravel crunched on the ground as we walked. Aromas of popcorn and cotton candy wafted through the air. The carousel played its jingly tunes. Even in the daytime, lights flashed on the amusements. But I remember best the sound of the Comet. The clackety clatter of the roller coaster permeated throughout and got louder each time a rolling car would approach closer to our picnic table. I remember the sound increasing and fading as the cars climbed toward the high points on the coaster, then swiftly rolled down the deep curves of the structure, only to rise again at the next peak. Thrilling shrieks of the riders paralleled the shaking sounds of the wooden structure as the Comet moved over its course through the park.

I wanted to ride the Comet, knowing that it was supposed to be fun, but it also scared me. I did, finally, get enough courage to board for the adventure. Climbing slowly up to the 85-foot peak of the first rise, the ride did not seem so bad, but I was anticipating the terror of the downward drop. When it happened, I screamed with most of those onboard, holding my breath and squinting my eyes as we sped down that first slope, only to rise again for the next one and repeat the experience. A few brave riders raised

their arms as the car thrust down the steep curves, but I held onto the bar that secured me to my seat. Just a few minutes of fast-moving thrills and screams, then it was over. The cars pulled into the station, and for a few seconds, there was silence as the cars stopped. I felt my hands relax, and I sighed as my breathing returned to normal. Then I laughed. I survived the Comet!

STOP 6

Gallery 235

Victoria Windsor-Clive

Speaker

David R. Hanlon

Educator and Collector

Saint Louis, Missouri

Hello, I'm David Hanlon, a Saint Louis educator and collector, and was happy to contribute this print by Lady Lucy Bridgeman to the Saint Louis Art Museum's collection.

Taking pictures of family and friends is today so spontaneous and effortless that we sometimes forget earlier methods of doing this. In the second decade after photography's introduction as a new technology, a method of creating negatives on glass for printing came into vogue. It was a somewhat laborious undertaking but became a fashionable pastime among aristocratic men and women in Britain in the 1850s and 1860s. For many women photography was a pursuit that was seen as aligned with sketching or painting but allowed more opportunities to interact with various extended family members as well as to share their skills more widely within their circle or to exhibit with some of the earliest photographic societies or clubs.

Lady Lucy Bridgeman, the daughter of the second Earl of Bradford, learned photography—along with her sister Charlotte—from their neighbor Lord Forester, and over a period of several years made many fine portraits of friends and family indoors and outside of the family houses near Birmingham, England. These pictures were displayed into albums that were retained by relatives for generations.

This study of the sister of Lucy's brother-in-law displays a comfortable and relaxed pose that was often difficult to achieve with a necessary camera exposure time of several seconds. This ease and naturalness is reflected in most of Bridgeman's surviving works. Tragically, both Lucy and her sister died in a fire in 1858, but her visual ideas and technical skills remain with us to enjoy—connecting her age with ours in the ideas of sharing pictures of family.

I acquired this print at an auction in 2001. It is a page from an album of Bridgeman's

work and contains a decorated border that she added around the print. In its original context, this piece would have been seen with other individual portraits, groupings of people outdoors and indoors, as well as with some architectural and landscape studies.

STOP 7

Gallery 235

Nuclear Test Craters on Yucca Flat, Area 10, Nevada Test Site

Speaker

Hannah Wier

Research Assistant in Prints, Drawings, and Photographs

Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, my name is Hannah Wier, and I'm a research assistant in prints, drawings, and photographs at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

This photograph by Emmet Gowin was taken over the Nevada desert, though the depicted landscape more closely resembles a pockmarked lunar surface than any naturally occurring landscape on our planet. Between 1951 and 1992, over 900 nuclear weapons were detonated at the Nevada Test Site, now known as the Nevada National Security Site. Subsidence craters, seen in large number here, are formed when a nuclear weapon is detonated hundreds or even thousands of feet belowground. The resulting explosion creates a cavity under the earth's surface, forcing the ground above to collapse downward, much like a sinkhole.

In the late 1980s Gowin sought permission from the Department of Energy to photograph the Nevada Test Site with the support of Princeton University, where he taught as a professor of photography from 1973 to 2009. Gowin was permitted to capture aerial photographs of the Nevada Test Site in 1996 and 1997, and he remains the only person who has been granted permission to photograph the site. In 2019 Gowin recalled how witnessing the immense environmental impact of the nuclear tests in Nevada had affected him over time. He writes: "Slowly, I began to understand how a thousand tests looked and felt, and I knew it was time to stop. I began to feel a profound sense of dread and remorse. How much did it cost to do all these things? And in what ways are we still paying?"

Gowin acknowledges the relationship between beauty and terror that is imbued in his Nevada Test Site photographs, stating: "I think our fascination for what is terrible is great. Our need for beauty is great. . . . And oddly, instead of wanting to run away from what is, granted, a terrible thing to know, I wanted to know more and hold it as an image."

Gowin's photographs transform the inconceivable reality of the United States's extensive nuclear testing into a palpable object, leaving the viewer awestruck by the sheer terror and uncanny beauty of this desolate wasteland.

STOP 8
Gallery 235
Celestial Tree

Speakers

Alex Marr

**Andrew W. Mellon Assistant Curator for Native American Art
Saint Louis Art Museum**

Skawennati
Artist

[Alex]

My name is Alex Marr, and I am the Andrew W. Mellon Assistant Curator for Native American Art at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

The artist Skawennati created this work using the world-building software program *Second Life*. She calls the medium of this picture a machinimagraph. A machinima is a video produced in a virtual world; by extension, a machinimagraph is a still image created in a virtual world.

Here's the artist describing this work from a 2021 Museum event:

[Skawennati]

She Falls for Ages is a sci-fi retelling of the Haudenosaunee creation story. And if you know that story, it always takes place in Sky World, which is a place beyond the heavens. Usually, how I've ever seen it, it's always depicted as precontact Iroquois. In other words, bark longhouses, buckskin clothing, clay pots.

And what happens in the story is there is a tree, a very special tree—also, [it] has different versions: sometimes it has many different kinds of fruit on the one tree, and sometimes it has blossoms that light the world. And in the story, there is always a pregnant woman, and the tree gets uprooted. Because there's many versions of the story too, so I'm trying to tell you the things that are common to each version. The tree is uprooted, and this woman goes through the hole created by the tree and lands on earth with the help of birds. She safely lands on an earth covered with water. And the birds help her find a place to rest, which is on the back of a turtle. In her hands, she has

brought from her world seeds.

In one of the stories, she's scratching at the ground as she's falling, and she had seeds in her hands as she fell. She gets more help from more animals and gets some earth from underneath the water. And she plants the seeds on the back of the turtle and the turtle grows to become Turtle Island.

In my version of the story, I wanted Sky World to be another planet. And I wanted that planet to be my Utopia. I wanted it to be sustainable, like, people lived in an environmentally friendly way. Indeed, in the story itself, they say that it was a beautiful place, that it was—people didn't even know death. It was so wonderful to live there. So that's why it looks like this. I chose the version where the blossoms light the world.