

CONNECTIONS

OUR ARTISTIC DIVERSITY DIALOGUES WITH OUR COLLECTIONS

Connections unites the work of seven Canadian contemporary artists from culturally diverse communities, who were inspired by the Museum's world cultures collections. Commissioned thanks to the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, under the New Chapter program established to mark Canada's 150th anniversary, these works will be integrated into the new Stéphan Crétier and Stéphanie Maillery Wing for World Cultures and Togetherness, set to open next June. *Connections* is an opportunity for the public to preview seven modern artworks alongside the artists' objects of inspiration, and (re)discover the Museum's collections. This exhibition project is rooted in the postcolonial theories of Indian philosopher Homi K. Bhabha and, more specifically, his rich and

empowering concept of hybridity. Given that our collections are essentially composed of objects acquired from Western collectors, they offer but a partial reflection of the artworks' cultures of origin and are often associated with visions of exoticism and rarity rather than cultural representativeness. Therefore, inviting artists from culturally diverse communities to reappropriate the world cultures collections by creating and exhibiting selected works makes way for a cultural recontextualization that is both imaginative and inclusive. Without denying the past, this approach emphasizes the coming together of the many peoples and cultural hybridities that make up today's world. GENEVIÈVE GOYER-OUIMETTE

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SEPTEMBER 4, 2018 – JUNE 23, 2019

JEAN-NOËL DESMARAIS PAVILION – LEVEL S2

CREDITS AND CURATORIAL TEAM

An installation of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, supported by the Canada Council for the Arts' New Chapter program. It is curated by Laura Vigo, Curator of Asian Art, MMFA, in collaboration with Erell Hubert, Curator of Pre-Columbian Art, MMFA, and Geneviève Goyer-Ouimette, Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Curator of Quebec and Canadian Contemporary Art (from 1945 to Today), MMFA.

ARWA ABOUON

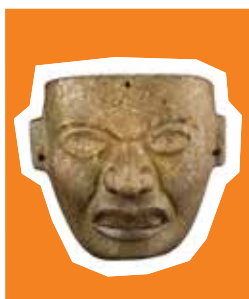


When Canadian artist Arwa Abouon's family immigrated to Canada, Arwa was just a year old. Growing up in Montreal, she self-identified as Québécoise, while the culture in her family home was Libyan and Amazigh, thus blurring and complexifying her sense of identity. Abouon's native roots and tribal and family lineage, which she learned about through her parents and family photo albums, are also deeply engrained in her, as revealed in the themes of her artmaking. The negotiation of a plural identity effectively constitutes the conceptual core of Abouon's work. This "unhomed," nomadic existential experience, while undoubtedly uncomfortable, has

given rise to a cultural and an aesthetic multilingualism capable of speaking across boundaries erected by socio-political discourses on race, religion and even global strife. Achieving a sense of belonging as a perpetual outsider who belongs both everywhere and nowhere requires love and compassion. Because these alone can heal social divisions and personal wounds, they are central to Abouon's borderless, autobiographical art. VALERIE BEHIERY

IRAN, Tile, late 13th-early 14th c., frit body, moulded and overglaze lustre decoration, opaque white glaze. MMFA, purchase

MARIA EZCURRA AND NURIA CARTON DE GRAMMONT



Personal Belongings is the fruit of a collaboration between artist Maria Ezcurra, who frequently explores the mental, physical and emotional ramifications of emigration in her work, and Nuria Carton de Grammont, an art historian specialized in Latin American contemporary art. This project looks at personal and cultural identity through the lens of memory, belonging and migration. Twenty-one Quebecers who emigrated from 21 countries across the Americas tell their stories through a personal object that played an important part in their immigration process. Bringing these testimonials together on an interactive platform, the artists invite us into the journey of members of

the Latin-American and Caribbean communities, as told in their own words. In doing so, they involve the participants in the decision-making process that determines the narrative of their histories and cultural identities. By establishing a dialogue between the contemporary objects presented by the participants and the objects of the Museum's collection, this project reveals the personal, artistic and sacred value and the journey of each item – two elements that are often unknown in archeological objects. ERELL HUBERT

MEXICO, CENTRAL HIGHLANDS, Early Classic Period (200-600 A.D.). Teotihuacán, mask, 200-600 A.D., stone. MMFA, purchase, gift of Miss Mabel Molson

BRENDAN FERNANDES



Brendan Fernandes explores the transitional and hybrid nature of identity, an interest that stems from his own experience as a Canadian artist of Kenyan and Indian descent. In his artistic practice, he often uses African objects from museums. The lost traces of their provenance raises questions about their authenticity and casts a light on their colonial past. In this installation, the artist establishes an analogy between the history of these objects and his own journey. A former dancer, Fernandes is interested in the importance of the body in expressing cultural identity, and he turns to choreography as the universal experiential

language. In *Lost in Display: Re-Performing African Masquerade*, he explores the absence of performance gestures associated with African masks. In museums, the bodies of dancers are left out, the masks themselves displayed immobile, alienated from the cultural traditions that gave them life. Using virtual reality, Fernandes invites us to participate in the masquerade with filmed dancers in order to reconnect the masks with their gestural vocabulary and recreate the bodily experience. EH

NIGERIA, SOUTHEASTERN REGION, Igbo, Mmwo female mask, early 20th c., carved and painted wood. MMFA, gift of Guy Laliberté in honour of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' 150th anniversary

HUA JIN



In her exploration of the existential transience of time, life and material things, Chinese Canadian Hua Jin reveals her preoccupation with the dissipation of culture threatened by globalization, mass-production and the depletion of the natural environment. Inspired by the Museum's Chinese underglaze cobalt blue porcelains, Jin created twelve plates that bridge the past and the present. To the keen observer, the work draws attention to the environmental, cultural and spiritual sacrifices made by China in the name of economic development. Each plate bears a different laser-printed traditional motif, which has been blurred and faded. While referencing Chinese tradition, the fading emphasizes

the idea of disappearance and transformation. Disappearing are not only the original motifs associated with ancient China but, more poignantly, the craftsmanship, traditional culture, actual natural landscapes and once harmonious relationship between humans and nature. While the ancient underglaze blue porcelains may have represented the luxurious exotica sought by Western collectors, Jin's modern kitchenware represent the mass-production of contemporary China, forever catering to Western consumerism.

LAURA VIGO

CHINA, JIANGXI PROVINCE, JINGDEZHEN, Ming dynasty (1368-1644), bowl, about 1450-1500, porcelain, painted decoration in underglaze blue. MMFA, gift of Stephen Glass

KAREN TAM



Chinese Canadian Karen Tam is known for the subversive sense of humour with which she explores themes of migration, identity and cultural dissimulation. Tam is also interested in the Museum's collection of Export Chinese ceramics, and her artworks brilliantly address tropes by representing a certain idea of "Chinese-ness" while challenging our arbitrary representation of other cultures and their commodification. In the early eighteenth century, Japanese Imari-style vessels were made in China to meet rising Western demand. Inspired by a set of such vessels in our collection, Tam's seven triple-gourd style vases mimic traditional decoration using sequins and Styrofoam. But rather than

depicting birds, Karen chose crawling insect mimics that take on the appearance of other insects in order to blend into their surroundings and fool predators or prey. In reference and contrast to the mass-production of goods in China, both genuine and fake, Tam's vases are made in the labour- and time-intensive process of pinning each sequin to the vase by hand – an exercise that takes between one and three months to complete. LV

CHINA, JIANGXI PROVINCE, JINGDEZHEN, Qing dynasty (1644-1911), Kangxi period (1662-1722), Imari style vases, about 1710-1720, porcelain, painted decoration in underglaze blue and overglaze enamel, gilding. MMFA, gift of J. Gemmil Wilson

PAVITRA WICKRAMASINGHE



In exploring the Museum's Asian collection, Canadian Sri Lankan Pavitra Wickramasinghe was drawn to a modest object, a Sawankhalok tea caddy dated to the sixteenth century. Originally created in Thailand as a perfumed-oil jar, this object got shipped to Japan where it was recycled into the tea ceremony as a powdered tea container. The way in which the jar adapted to a new place – identity and use reinvented – resonated with the artist's work on migration, translation and islands. The caddy's wondrous journey reflects the movement of commerce, culture, tradition and religion. Wickramasinghe captures the essence of translation and transformation brought on by migration through an imaginary

landscape conjured up by projecting the shadows of a series of sculptures onto a panoramic screen. Placed on turntables, the sculptures' shadows continuously morph and evolve, each one deconstructing the tea caddy visually as well as metaphorically, thus exploring the original in shape, materials and ornamentation. Although the sculptures reference the original prototype, their forms also venture beyond it, playing with the idea of ever-evolving transformation. The artist urges us to question what is lost, gained and morphed in the translation. LV

THAILAND, Sawankhalok tea caddy (chaire), 16th c., stoneware, painted decoration in underglaze blue over white slip, Japanese bamboo lid. MMFA, Adaline Van Horne Bequest

Z'OTZ* COLLECTIVE



Formed in Toronto in 2004, Z'otz* Collective is composed of artists Nahúm Flores, Erik Jerezano and Ilyana Martínez. The trio's work is characterized by a collaborative, playful and intuitive energy as well as by the connection the object creates between the respective unconscious of its members. Each of their ceramic sculptures starts with a piece of clay, a desire to be surprised throughout the creative process and a symbolic animal as inspiration for exploring notions of mutation and transformation. Z'otz Collective's attachment to its Latin American roots is manifested firstly in its name, zotz, the Mayan word for the animal bat, as

well as in the group's work with clay and their choice of subjects, which are often inspired by Mesoamerican legends. For example, with the nahuales – Aztec mythological characters – the artists make reference to the animal spirit and the power of shamans. By representing hybrid beings, objects and elements of flora and fauna in transition, they evoke the evolution, migration, regeneration and ambiguity of our animate and inanimate worlds to great emotional effect. EH

COSTA RICA, GUANACASTE, Periods V-VI (500-1550 A.D.), Guanacaste Nicoya, incense burner with cover in the form of an alligator, 600-1100 A.D., Terracotta. MMFA, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lorne C. Webster