

Bowdoin College Museum of Art



About the Bowdoin College Museum of Art

The Bowdoin College Museum of Art, founded in 1811, is one of the oldest and most prestigious collegiate art collections in the country with an encyclopedic collection of more than 20,000 objects. The collection is housed in the landmark Walker Art Building, designed in 1894 by Charles Follen McKim of McKim, Mead, and White, and located on the historic quadrangle of Bowdoin College. A 2007 renovation and expansion by Machado and Silvetti Associates, which increased the Museum's space by 63%, has re-established the Museum as the centerpiece of Bowdoin's vibrant arts and culture community.



The Bowdoin College Museum of Art began with 70 paintings and a portfolio of Old Master drawings bequeathed to the College by James Bowdoin III in 1811. Today, the collection encompasses more than 20,000 objects that range from antiquity to contemporary works of art. The various collections, including paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, drawings, prints, and photographs, are among the most comprehensive of any college museum in the country. The BCMA continues to actively expand its collections through acquisition, gift, and bequest.



American Art

The BCMA's American collection includes works ranging from the colonial era to the present. It features one of the most important groups of colonial and Federal portraits, including Gilbert Stuart's portraits of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison and works by Robert Feke, John Singleton Copley, Joseph Blackburn, and Rembrandt Peale. Notable 19th- and 20th- century artists represented in the collection include Mary Cassatt, Thomas Eakins, John Sloan, Rockwell Kent, Man Ray, John Marin, Marsden Hartley, and Andrew Wyeth. Another highlight is the collection of letters, photographs, and artifacts that once belonged to Winslow Homer and were given to the Museum by his family.



Among the highlights of Charles McKim's landmark Beaux Arts building are the famous rotunda murals (representing Athens, Rome, Florence, and Venice) by leading painters of the American Renaissance: John LaFarge, Elihu Vedder, Abbott Thayer, and Kenyon Cox.



European Art

Since the first European art came into the BCMA's collection with James Bowdoin's bequest, several significant acquisitions have expanded upon its holdings, such as the 1961 gift of 12 Renaissance paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. Highlights include a *cassone* (marriage chest) painting attributed to the young Fra Angelico, and Pontorno's elegant grisaille of Apollo and Daphne, made to adorn a ceremonial carriage that celebrated the return of the Medicis to Florence in 1513. Rare medieval objects, such as the limestone head of a king from the choir screen at Chartres Cathedral, and an intricately carved *memento mori* ivory prayer bead, provide insight into the material culture of devotion in Europe from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries. Modern European masters in the collection include Eugène Louis Boudin, René Magritte, and Wols.



Ancient Art

The ancient art collection began in 1860 with the gift of five large ninth-century-B.C. carved Assyrian bas-relief sculptures from the excavated palace of King Ashurnasirpal II. The collection comprises more than 1,800 Egyptian, Assyrian, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine objects and constitutes one of the most comprehensive compilations of ancient art in any small college museum in North America. The

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ancient collection expanded greatly in the early 20th century when Edward Perry Warren donated examples of nearly every major type and style of pottery and vase painting dating from the 14th century B.C. to the end of the Roman Empire. Highlights of the collection include the finest examples of vase and pottery painting by the ancient Greek artists now known as the “Bowdoin Painter” and the “Bowdoin Eye Painter;” and a Roman marble head of Antoninus Pius.

Contemporary Art

Major contemporary artists in BCMA’s collection include Alex Katz, Sol Lewitt, and Alyson Shotz. The Museum’s contemporary collection was greatly enhanced by the recent acquisition of 320 works of art from the celebrated Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection. Announced in January 2014, the gift has enabled the Museum to comprehensively represent the evolving history of minimal, post-minimal, and conceptual art practice. The Vogel gift comprises works on paper by nearly 70 artists, such as Robert Barry, Lucio Pozzi, James Siena, Pat Steir, and Richard Tuttle, as well as photography by Richard Long, ceramics by Michael Lucero, and sculpture by Merrill Wagner.



Drawings

With the earliest collection of Old Master drawings in the country in the BCMA’s collection, drawings have always been one of the Museum’s strengths. Ranging from Old Master to contemporary, the collection is noted for distinguished Flemish, Dutch, and Italian works from the 16th through the 18th centuries, as well as important drawings by 19th- and 20th-century artists including John Ruskin, John Singer Sargent, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, George Braque, Arshile Gorky, Franz Kline, Joan Miró, Paul Klee, Eva Hesse, and Sol LeWitt.



Prints

The print collection is one of the Museum’s particular strengths—currently comprising more than 6,700 prints from the 15th to the 21st centuries. From Albrecht Dürer to Kiki Smith, virtually every major printmaker from the 15th century to the present is well-represented. The print collection was significantly enhanced by the recent bequest of Bowdoin alumnus and former trustee David P. Becker of 1,500 prints by Western masters ranging from Albrecht Dürer and Rembrandt to David Hockney and Jasper Johns. Other highlights of the Museum’s print holdings are large bodies of work by Winslow Homer and John Sloan. A nearly complete collection of prints published by Maine’s Vinalhaven Press is also noteworthy.



Photography

For the past 30 years, the Museum has focused on enhancing its photography collection through the acquisition of vintage prints. The photography collection includes almost 3,000 works, ranging from examples by some of the earliest practitioners—such as Nadar, Henry Fox Talbot, Anna Atkins, David Octavius Hill, and Robert Adamson—through to works by modern and contemporary photographers, including Cindy Sherman, Abelardo Morrell, Mark Klett, Sally Mann, Diane Arbus, and Edward Burtytsky.

