

THE WORLD STAGE

**Contemporary Art from the Collections of
Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation**



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Contemporary American artists in the 21st century have tremendous latitude to determine their own paths and express their unique artistic voices and visions. Freed from the burdens of past centuries, when artists were expected to adhere to established styles or movements, artists today can draw from a wide range of inspiration. They draw from pop culture, art historical precedents, the natural world, cultural and gender identity—or a combination of these influences—to inform their own personal vision.

This exhibition assembles the work of 35 artists who range from the most prominent art world stars to lesser known talents. All the artists in *The World Stage* were born in the 20th century, and the majority are still producing work. Some are household names, such as Pop Art luminary Andy Warhol, represented by his series *Reigning Queens*, which reflects the artist's well-known attraction to celebrities including royalty. Others are emerging stars, such as Vanessa German, the self-taught Pittsburgh-based artist known for her sculptures she calls 'contemporary power figures.' Seen as a whole, the selection of artworks—including installation, painting, sculpture, and prints made with diverse techniques—demonstrate the dazzling variety of work being created in this country today.

The title "The World Stage" is borrowed from the name of a series of paintings by Kehinde Wiley, an artist best known for his presidential portrait of Barack Obama that hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC. This title points toward the influence that American contemporary artists exert globally. Just as the nation's technological and business innovations are exported to other countries, so are aesthetic sensibilities that originate in the United States, gain resonance around the world, and are adopted internationally.

About the Collector

Jordan D. Schnitzer has made his mark in the global contemporary art world through his prodigious collecting as well as through serving museums across the United States by making his collection freely available and accessible to all. Schnitzer, a native of Oregon, grew up surrounded by art. His mother operated a contemporary Northwest art gallery, The Fountain Gallery of Art, for 25 years. Schnitzer purchased his first work of art when he was 14 years old. It was through his mother and her gallery that his initial acquisition turned into a life-long pursuit. This legacy lives on, as Schnitzer supports numerous art museums that bear his name in Oregon, Washington, and beyond.

Schnitzer began buying contemporary prints in earnest in 1988. Prints seized his interest for their technical versatility and collaborative process. Today, the collection numbers more than 14,000 works by contemporary artists from around the world. Schnitzer and his staff have facilitated over 140 exhibitions at 90 museums—including *The World Stage*, organized by the Nevada Museum of Art.

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Art and Civic Engagement

Activism and art often go hand in hand. The artists in this section embed layers of meaning into their work so that it exists not only as a visual statement but also as an expression of their political belief system. Mildred Howard collages images of stars from the rap and hip-hop world with Civil Rights-era clippings from the *Los Angeles Tribune* to suggest that struggle remains a constant feature of contemporary life regardless of the era. Marie K. Watt's woodcut depicts words that give the impression of being a participant in a 1960s anti-war demonstration. Vanessa German's sculptural assemblages transform images of African American oppression into contemporary power figures. Each artwork resonates with the individual experience and perspective of its maker to engage with larger global issues.

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Signs and Symbols

Artists in this section juxtapose historical motifs with imagery drawn from everyday life, creating works that can be read in a variety of ways. Jean-Michel Basquiat combines graffiti-like symbols with erudite references to the ancient world and the names of mythological, literary, and historical figures, resulting in a rich visual puzzle. Rauschenberg combines the logo of a winged horse or Pegasus from Greek mythology (adopted by American gas company Mobil as a corporate logo) with an actual chair, enabling him to use a pun as his title: *Pegasits*. A photographic image of the exterior of a restaurant, complete with a list of available dishes and a series of empty beer bottles, completes the disparate visual mix.

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Organic Abstraction

The artists in this section use organic shapes as a point of departure for their formal investigations. Mark Bradford's looping forms allude to chain-link fencing, transforming a ubiquitous aspect of the urban landscape into visual poetry. Sarah Sze's cosmological imagery provides a glimpse of planetary activity that seems to exist within a larger system, while Vija Celmins's ethereal prints are focused studies of details of natural systems. Nicola López's dramatic installation tells a tale of the ability of plants to take root in inhospitable urban settings, and gradually descend into dissolution and decay. Leonardo Drew's wooden construction is an exploration of how abstract forms can convey emotion, invoking a range of landscape references from waterfall to crumbling architecture.

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Color and Pattern

Helen Frankenthaler's spectacular woodblock print was created using more than one-hundred separate colors to create a harmonious celebration of color and form. The circular kite is a recurring form in Jacob Hashimoto's work, and he uses it to organize his personal vocabulary of evocative visual forms. Domestic references inform the work of both Salomon Huerta, whose houses are studies of how color interacts, and Mickalene Thomas, whose riotous interiors are layered with shards and blocks of color to create a contemporary take on modernist themes. Willie Cole's characteristic steam iron patterns both honor domestic labor and create fanciful compositions, while Wendy Red Star's lithographs juxtapose vibrant color and traditional patterns with aspects of everyday life on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana.

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Reigning Queens

The United States was founded, in part, to escape the traditional British royal system of having a supreme leader and inherited throne. Yet a persistent fascination with monarchs continues to define the American experience. Artist Andy Warhol, who once said, “I want to be as famous as the Queen of England,” created a series titled *Reigning Queens*, using official formal portraits of four monarchs as a starting point for his colorful silkscreens. Without a formal monarchy, America has turned to pop culture icons. Today’s undisputed sovereign of American pop music is Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, known to her myriad fans as “Queen Bey.” Oprah Winfrey, often referred to as the “Queen of All Media,” has built a powerful television and publishing empire and is considered by many to be American royalty.

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**The United States has
always been an idea.
It's based on an idea,
a work in progress
that is constantly changing.
That said, there is a universal
connection between people
and places separated by
arbitrary borders.**

**It is my responsibility as
an artist to cross that border.**

— MILDRED HOWARD

**Art is about
communicating power,
and it's been that way
for hundreds of years...**

**What I choose to do
is take people who
happen to look like me,
black and brown,
people all over the
world increasingly,
and allow them to occupy
that field of power.**

— KEHINDE WILEY