



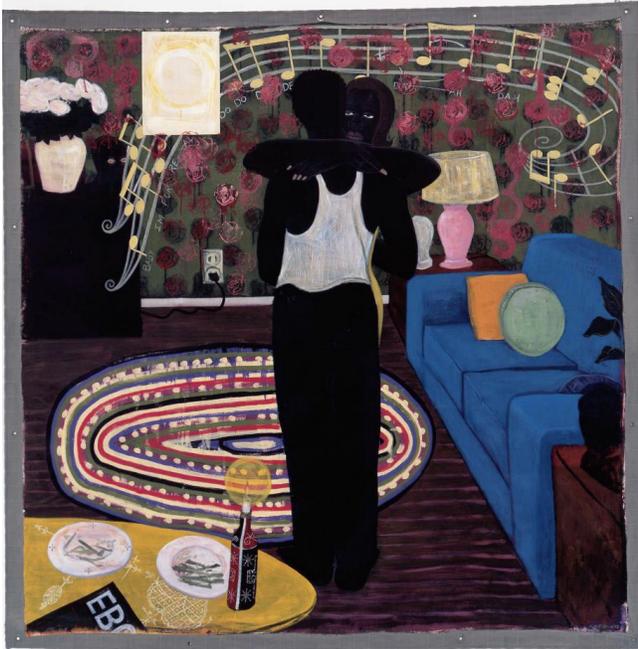
Expanding Narratives: The Figure and the Ground

April 24 to December 30, 2018 | Public opening reception: Monday, May 7, 7–8:30 pm

Smart Museum of Art announces three-year, three-part collections and exhibitions series

Major reinstallation with key loans launches commitment to diversity and critical inquiry in the arts

Invites applications for a new, two-year Curatorial Fellowship for Diversity in the Arts



The University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art announces a major reinstallation of its collection and the launch of *Expanding Narratives*, a three-year, three-part collections and exhibitions series. By combining key loans from University of Chicago alumni and Chicago-area collectors with works from the Smart's collection, the series offers an open platform to examine the composition and role of the Museum's collection and how the addition of new works can shift and expand the narrative possibilities the Smart can create and share.

On view from April 24 to December 30, 2018, *Expanding Narratives: The Figure and the Ground* is the first iteration in the series. The exhibition uses the formal relationship between the figure and the ground as a conceptual springboard to broaden and diversify the canon of Western art history from the 18th century to the present day. Unfolding chronologically, the exhibition tells a familiar story of aesthetic progress—from naturalism to abstraction to a plurality of contemporary art practices across media—but gives pride of place to the work of women and people of color. *Expanding Narratives* projects a model curatorial and collecting practice for the University of Chicago's museum through this celebration of alternative voices and diverse perspectives.

In preparation for the reinstallation, the Smart will reconfigure its galleries by demolishing a long interior wall that has been in place for nearly twenty years. The resulting large, open expanse will provide new sightlines and opportunities to display large-scale works. Following the thematic concept of the exhibition, the new installation and gallery reconfiguration asks each visitor to consider themselves as a figure against the newly considered ground of gallery spaces.

“At its best, the Smart Museum’s exhibitions program should offer the experience of sitting in a great seminar at the University of Chicago, where members of our community—both on campus and beyond—come together to think deeply and share different perspectives around a crucial topic,” said Alison Gass, the Dana Feitler Director of the Smart Museum. “We don’t have the space to tell an encyclopedic history all at once. But we can be flexible and build an exhibitions and collections program that positions us as a site of critical debate, reflective of the academic excellence and global impact of the University. As we look to the future, the *Expanding Narratives* series will offer a transparent platform for us to consider what constitutes a great university art museum collection in the 21st century.”

The second chapter in the *Expanding Narratives* series will open in spring 2019 and will focus on how museums, collectors, scholars, and, indeed, artists themselves are re-inscribing African American artists and artists of the African Diaspora into the canon of art history. The third and final chapter in 2020 will break with traditional geographic divisions in museum display to tell an ambitious global history of art. The project will be installed chronologically with works from around the globe grouped together to examine critical points of intersection among people and cultures.

“Exhibitions and collections programs are, of course, essential components of any museum,” said Michael Christiano, Deputy Director and Curator of Public Practice, “but how do you measure the utility of a collection against the wonderfully plural interests of a museum’s publics? For the Smart in particular, our collection supports teaching and learning activities for diverse audiences, from elementary students from neighborhood Chicago Public Schools to UChicago students from around the globe to life-long learners and art-lovers across the city. The *Expanding Narratives* series provides an opportunity to ask, how can we develop an inclusive collecting strategy that reflects and challenges the issues and questions shared by our community? How can we build a collection and program that sparks connections and dialogue?”

Curatorial Fellow for Diversity in the Arts

In the spirit of these conversations and the *Expanding Narratives* series, the Smart Museum announces a two-year postdoctoral fellowship to help expand the professional fields of art history and museum practice to include individuals from traditionally underrepresented populations.

The Smart invites applicants for the Curatorial Fellow for Diversity in the Arts, a position designed to broaden and diversify the Museum’s program—with a focus on the collection, special exhibitions, and public programs—while advancing the Fellow’s own research as part of the scholarly community at the University of Chicago. Priority for the first Curatorial Fellow will be given to candidates with a research

focus on African American art or art of the African diaspora. A full posting for the fellowship is available at: www.uchicago.edu/jobs. Inquiries to Issa Lampe, Director of the Feitler Center for Academic Inquiry, at: issalampe@uchicago.edu.

About *The Figure and the Ground*

Expanding Narratives: The Figure and the Ground takes a formal concept that underpins visual representation—the relationship between the figure and the ground or background of a work—and then uses touchstone works to demonstrate the myriad ways that artists throughout Western art history manipulated, debated, and, in some cases, ultimately eradicated the dichotomy altogether. It includes single-point perspective landscape paintings that act almost like windows on the natural world, modern works that play with perspective or use multiple viewpoints, surrealist paintings that create new realities, abstract works that emphasize surface quality and artifice over illusion, and even sculptures and installations that invite the viewer to enter into a figure-ground relationship with the artwork itself. Artists include: Kevin Beasley, McArthur Binion, Gustave Caillebotte, Nick Cave, Paul Delvaux, Dan Flavin, Sam Gilliam, Jeppe Hein, Lee Krasner, Kerry James Marshall, Alice Neel, Trevor Paglen, Mark Rothko, Cindy Sherman, Sylvia Sleigh, Kara Walker, Jack Whitten, and Kehinde Wiley, among others.

Adjacent to the main space, a section of the exhibition curated by Anne Leonard, Senior Curator of European Art, explores how French printmaker Félix Buhot (1847–1898) dissolved classic distinctions between figure and ground in ways that challenge the limits of the etching medium.

Through all of these works, *Expanding Narratives* examines the social, political, and creative impulses that help drive the creation and subversion of illusionary space in art while also challenging visitors to consider all the ways their own sense of perception and perspective can be shaped through the museum space.

Related programs

The opening of *Expanding Narratives: The Figure and the Ground* will be celebrated alongside *Tang Chang: The Painting that is Painted with Poetry is Profoundly Beautiful* during a public reception on Monday, May 7, 7–8:30 pm. Additional programs will be posted to the Smart Museum's website at smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/calendar.

About

The exhibition is curated by Alison Gass, Dana Feitler Director of the Smart Museum, and Jennifer Carty, Assistant Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art.

Support

Support for *Expanding Narratives: The Figure and the Ground* has been provided by Mary Smart and the Smart Family Foundation of New York and by the Smart Museum's Pamela and R. Christopher Hoehn-Saric Exhibition Fund. Additional support has been provided by the Museum's SmartPartners.

The exhibition is presented in the Elisabeth and William M. Landes Gallery, the Janis Kanter and Thomas McCormick Gallery, and the Richard and Mary L. Gray Gallery.

###

Images (left to right)

Kerry James Marshall, *Slow Dance*, 1992–1993, Mixed media and acrylic on canvas. Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, Purchase, Smart Family Foundation Fund for Contemporary Art, and Paul and Miriam Kirkley Fund for Acquisitions, 2004.23.

Lee Krasner, *Cauldron*, 1956, oil on canvas. Private Collection.

About the Smart Museum of Art

As the fine arts museum of the University of Chicago, the Smart Museum of Art is home to thought-provoking exhibitions and an exquisite collection of more than 15,000 objects, including modern masterpieces, millennia-old Chinese artworks, rich examples of Renaissance painting, and provocative works of contemporary art. The Museum offers distinctive programs that inspire visitors of all ages to experience the dynamic role of the visual arts in our world. The Smart first opened in 1974.

Mission

The Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago opens the world through art and ideas.

Smart Museum of Art

The University of Chicago
5550 S. Greenwood Avenue
Chicago, IL 60637

773.702.0200

smartmuseum.uchicago.edu

smart-museum@uchicago.edu

Hours

Tuesday–Sunday, 10 am–5 pm

Thursday evenings until 8 pm

Galleries are closed Mondays and holidays.

Admission is always free. All are welcome.