take care,

OCTOBER 1, 2020 - MARCH 21, 2021

SMART MUSEUM OF ART
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
Most of us need care, feel care, are cared for, or encounter care, in one way or another. Care is omnipresent, even through the effects of its absence.

—Maria Puig de la Bellacasa

Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds, 17

What does it mean to care for something, someone, or ourselves? Caring can be a form of affection, a survival strategy, a political tool, a mode of labor, and a means of sustenance. It can be driven by moral imperative or necessity. Whether an accumulation of small gestures, a singular bold act, or even strategic indifference, expressions of care—or the lack thereof—shape the world in which we live, one that is often fraught with competing tensions and complexities.

Drawing generously from the Smart Museum’s collection, Take Care seeks to unpack matters of care from the personal to the collective. Unfolding in four sections—Who Cares?, Sustenance, Testimony, and Ecologies of Care—the artworks on view range from portrayals of familial relations and societal obligations to gestures of hospitality and ritual; from strategies of bearing witness and evoking empathy to explorations of networks of care and the results of their absences. This conversation between more than fifty works of art considers and reveals the multifaceted ways care can be conveyed and experienced. And, in doing so, it urges the open-ended question of how we care for ourselves and each other in our broader social worlds.
Acknowledgments

This exhibition is curated by Jennifer Carty, Associate Curator for Modern and Contemporary Art, and Berit Ness, Assistant Curator of Academic Initiatives, Smart Museum of Art. Support for this exhibition has been provided by the Museum’s SmartPartners.

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Join the exhibition curators for a virtual walk-through of *Take Care.* This streaming video offers an introduction to the exhibition’s key themes and works.
WHO CARES?

Caring and caregiving operate at many registers, including everyday acts of maintenance and upkeep, expressions of love, and relational duty or obligation. Whether in a personal or professional capacity, the essential work of caring for others can be a joy and a burden. And who performs the labor of caregiving is persistently shaped by gender, race, and class. The artworks in this section emphasize how networks of care and support are fundamental, while underscoring the structural inequities inherent in those systems. These divergent objects present moments of tenderness and adoration, draw attention to unseen labor, and offer glimpses of resiliency.
SYLVIA SLEIGH
British (Welsh), lived in U.S.A., 1916-2010

Nancy Spero, Leon Golub and Sons
Stephen, Phillip, and Paul
1973

Oil on canvas
Gift of Leon Golub and Nancy Spero
1988.6
MIELE LADERMAN UKELES
American, born 1939

MANIFESTO FOR MAINTENANCE ART,
1969! Proposal for an exhibition: “CARE”
1969, Exhibition copy printed 2020

Ink on paper
Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery,
New York

Full Text Here
WHO CARES
CONSUELO KANAGA
American, 1894-1978

She is a Tree of Life to Them
1950

Gelatin silver print
Gift of the Estate of Lester and Betty Guttman
2014.444

Containing and protecting, Norma Bruce shades her children as they shrink into her arms. The young babies appear as branch-like extensions from their mother, who stands tall and elegantly curved. Her young son’s eyes communicate a confrontational uncertainty, while her daughter is concealed by the shadow of their embrace. In this documentary photograph from a study of migrant workers in Maitland, Florida, Consuelo Kanaga unveils the responsibilities and concerns of being a Black mother. Here, Kanaga captures the particularized reality of motherhood as a sustaining life force for vulnerable human beings.
BERTHE MORISOT
French, 1841-1895

The Drawing Lesson (Berthe Morisot with Her Daughter)
circa 1889

Drypoint on wove paper
University Transfer from Max Epstein Archive,
Purchase, 1958
1976.145.16
GLADYS NILSSON
American, born 1940

Maximysing
1993

Etching, ed. 25/40
Gift of the artist in memory of Whitney Halstead
1995.58d
JUNE LEAF
American, active in New York City and Mabou, Nova Scotia, born 1929

*Self Portrait IV*
1996

Pastel on paper
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Samuel Weiss
2019.15
SYLVIA SLEIGH
British (Welsh), lived in U.S.A., 1916-2010

*Portrait of Lawrence Alloway*
1979

Oil on canvas
Gift of Dennis Adrian in memory of the artist and in memory of Lawrence Alloway
2017.73
SUZANNE VALADON
French, 1865-1938

Portrait of Lily Walton
1923

Oil on canvas
Bequest of Joseph Halle Schaffner in memory of his beloved mother, Sara H. Schaffner
1973.119

The daughter of a domestic worker, Suzanne Valadon regularly painted ordinary women who were often from marginalized backgrounds. Before she had the financial stability to be a professional artist, Valadon supported herself as a nanny, dressmaker, and circus acrobat, as well as a model for many renowned artists. The model in this carefully painted portrait is that of Lily Walton, who served as the housekeeper for the artist’s Paris studio for thirty years. Here, Valadon renders Walton with a sense of dignity that shows respect for her subject and reflects the long relationship these two women shared.
WHO CARES

JUNE LEAF
American, active in New York City and Mabou, Nova Scotia, born 1929

Self-Portrait
circa 1960

Oil on wood panel
Gift of Joyce Turner Hilkevitch in memory of Carl Turner and Jonathan Turner
2005.3
Rosalind Fox Solomon
American, born 1930

Mother and Daughter, Erlanger Hospital,
Chattanooga, Tennessee. 1975

Mother, Daughter, Maid. Johannesburg,
South Africa. 1988-90
From the series: Women: Matter and Spirit
2002

Gelatin silver prints
Gift of Alan and Lois Fern
2006.117e and 2006.117j

American photographer Rosalind Fox Solomon’s artistic practice centers on an unflinching examination of the human condition that seeks to move beyond stereotype and artifice to reveal social complexity. Some of her first portraits, like the one on the left, come from a year-long project at Erlanger Hospital in Tennessee, where she was then living, photographing patients in vulnerable moments as they recovered from injury and illness.

Fox Solomon has traveled the world extensively taking photos. On the right, this work from South Africa presents a microcosm of the oppression systematized under apartheid. A Black domestic worker kneels on the floor, staring joylessly at the camera, while immediately beside her a white mother and her daughter, blonde and smiling, appear absorbed in their own world. The worker’s polka-dotted uniform with eyelet trim fits with the flowers, bows, and cherubs adorning the living room. This uniform serves as an indicator of her status and symbolizes the caretaking labor she performs. In these ways Fox Solomon’s composition surfaces the tensions inherent in systemic racism and its impact on unequal divisions of labor.
WHO CARES
MARY FRANK
American, born 1933

 Untitled
 circa 1960s

 Quiet Small Scroll
 1970-1971

Ink on paper
Gift of the Artist
2010:103 and 2010:97

As a woman descends from inverted mountains, a horse gallops left and a crane flies right, while a figure imprinted with the trace of a leaf gazes on. With deliberate simplicity, Mary Frank’s inky dreamscapes move inward. Born in London, Frank emigrated to New York City in 1940 after the outbreak of WWII to live with her grandparents. Her multidisciplinary practice characteristically takes on themes of memory, love, and human fallibility.

Both artworks on view were forms of a private, visual journaling process to meditate on the human form and the natural world and to offer a place for contemplation. Over the course of two years Frank would habitually unroll a portion of Quiet Small Scroll to paint a landscape, a bit of foliage, a person, an animal, or those forms intertwined. Entirely handmade, the rough-hewn wooden supports of the scroll contrast with the paper’s delicacy. These ongoing diaristic practices speak to everyday strategies of play and perseverance.
WHO CARES

SUELEN ROCCA
American, 1943-2020

Cha Cha Couple
1967

Oil on canvas
Gift of Ruth Horwich
1997.19

In this painting, Suellen Rocca catalogues the playful intimacy of dancing in what she calls the “visual language of romance and feminine happiness.” The joyful exchange of twirls, kicks, and glances between the titular Cha Cha Couple explodes into a map of domestic daydreams and fantasies: dresses, wedding rings, sunsets, ponies, palm trees, trumpets, high heels, and hairdos set the scene. Drawing from sources like advertisements, jewelry catalogues, and children’s books, Rocca developed an iconography unique from the other Chicago Imagists, the artist group with which she began exhibiting at the Hyde Park Art Center in the 1960s.
WHO CARES

KERRY JAMES MARSHALL
American, born 1955

Slow Dance
1992-1993

Mixed media and acrylic on canvas
Smart Family Foundation Fund for Contemporary Art, and Paul and Miriam Kirkley Fund for Acquisitions 2004.23

This painting by Kerry James Marshall unveils the private domestic bliss of a young couple. Through their intimate embrace, love is on display as they float along with the musical notes of the song “Baby I’m for Real.” Just above the speaker rests a sculptural head with cowrie shells defining the eyes, signifying wealth, intelligence, and fertility. In the foreground, white vèvè, religious symbols of Haitian Vodou, appear on a yellow table alongside a leftover meal and adorn a bottle candle holder offering devotion that invites in spiritual energy. Through Marshall’s complex yet accessible symbolism pulled from the aesthetics of the African diaspora, this painting reveals the rituals, persons, and objects that create a home.
H. C. WESTERMANN
American, 1922-1981

Untitled (“J & C Box”)
1959

Pine, brass, glass, mirror, and enamel
The H. C. Westermann Study Collection,
Gift of the Estate of Joanna Beall Westermann
2002.118

A masterful sculptor and carpenter, H. C. Westermann hand-built this keepsake box for his wife Joanna Beall Westermann’s parents in the same year they were married. His carved profile joins that of Joanna’s atop the box, which takes the form of a house with an inlaid front door and window along one side. Joanna’s eyes gleam with inset mirror glass. Giving artwork to friends and family was an ongoing practice for Westermann. These expressions of care show a deep kinship and compassion for the loved ones in his life.
WHO CARES

ERIKA ROTHENBERG
American, born 1950

Greetings II
1991

Gouache and ink on paper, plastic shelves
Gift of Penny Pritzker and Bryan Traubert
2018.17

In an age of apathy and an overwhelming abundance of information, Erika Rothenberg uses dark humor to prompt us to care about and work against the maladies of American exceptionalism. The artist draws on her experience in advertising to create this bold and graphic body of work, ironically twisting the unassuming format of a Hallmark-style greeting card into an arena for political satire. Instead of condolences and congratulations, viewers are confronted with references to sexual violence, nuclear Armageddon, white supremacy, imperialism, and more. Although they debuted in the 1990s, Rothenberg’s cards remain ever relevant, as these issues continue to greet us time and time again.
SUSTENANCE

Gestures of care, as hospitality or ritual, permeate our daily lives. From breaking bread with others to quiet comforts of domesticity and retreat, acts of generosity and self-care sustain us. The artworks in this section speak to all scales of nourishment, featuring expansive feasts and radical invitations alongside objects we use and places we seek for their restorative qualities. These repetitive and deliberate actions that often occupy the domestic sphere speak to the choreography, and occasional monotony, of modern life.
LAURA LETINSKY
American, born in Canada, 1962

Untitled #6
From the series: Rome
2009

Chromogenic print, ed. 2/9
Purchase, The Paul and Miriam Kirkley Fund for Acquisitions
2012.27
CATHY WILKES
Irish, born 1966

Untitled
2016

Pastel on cotton fabric, museum glass
Collection of the Booth School of Business
Art Collection

The enigmatic practice of Glasgow-based artist Cathy Wilkes enlists a range of everyday materials that engage the rituals of modern life. Her labor-intensive and subjective process brings together found objects and sculptural elements in staged arrangements that evoke domestic sites, often imbued with melancholy and an open-endedness that offers a range of possible interpretations.

Her abstract works, like the one seen here, mirror the laborious process that goes into her meticulously precise installations. Paintings are worked on repeatedly through the building up and scraping back of materials and are often incorporated into her sculptural environments.
SONJA ALHÄUSER
German, born 1969

Flying Feast
2012

Watercolor, acrylic, pencil, crayon on paper with metal grommets
Purchase, The Paul and Miriam Kirkley Fund for Acquisitions
2012.31

Serving sensation, fantasy, and humor, this “recipe drawing” by Sonja Alhäuer plans out a participatory performance she staged at the Smart Museum in 2012. Like an instruction manual, it illustrates the characters, components, and canapés that had been cast in her culinary melodrama, destined to be nibbled on by visitors. This performance took the tender gesture of cooking for someone to its theatrical extreme, rewriting the everyday rituals of hospitality, consumption, and the kitchen into a margarine mythology blessed by Neptune. This drawing thus demonstrates the ways we can sustain ourselves not only through food but also through community and celebration.
DEANA LAWSON
American, born 1979

*Hellshire Beach Towel with Flies, Portmore, Jamaica*
2013

Inkjet print
Collection of the Booth School of Business Art Collection

Stretching like a landscape tinted pink, the towel on this mat is an unusual subject for American photographer Deana Lawson, who is largely known for her portraits. Drawn to the terrains of the African diaspora in search of kinship and common ground, Lawson took this photo while ordering fish and cold beer at a beach shack in Jamaica. As the shack’s proprietor roused to help in the kitchen, flies swarmed to the imprint she left in the towel. Lawson’s spontaneous photograph of this moment marks the threshold between absence and presence and acts as a memory of her sojourns.
IMOGEN CUNNINGHAM
American, 1883-1976

The Unmade Bed
1957

Gelatin silver print
Gift of the Estate of Lester and Betty Guttman
2014.247
SUSTENANCE

AT CENTER

MARIANNE BRANDT
German, 1893–1983

Tea Service: Tea Infuser (Pot), Creamer, Sugar Bowl, and Tray
1924 (design, manufactured in 1924 or 1925)

Hand-wrought sterling silver and ebony
Anonymous Gift in memory of Liesl Landau
2006.191.4

ÖTAGAKI RENGETSU
Japanese, 1791–1875

Sake Cup
1868

Glazed hand-built earthenware with incised calligraphic poem
Purchase, Brooks McCormick Jr. Fund
2000.8

LOUISE NEVELSON
American, born in Ukraine, 1899–1988

# 1886 Cryptic II
1968

Painted wood and brass
Gift of Lawrence B. Buttenwieser in memory of Dorothy F. Rodgers
1993.2a-b

A tea set, a cup, a wooden box—these are all familiar, domestic objects. Designed by one of the few female metalworkers of the pioneering Bauhaus school of modern design, this tea set by Marianne Brandt combines avant-garde silhouettes with pragmatic details. With their simple geometry and lack of ornate decoration, the teapot and cup joined other Bauhaus objects in striving toward a utilitarian, democratic, and thoroughly modern design. Innovative details, like a heat-resistant wooden handle and a lid that doesn’t drip, made the teapot easier to use.

Ötagaki Rengetsu combined her skills in pottery, poetry, and calligraphy—for which she was doubly renowned during Japan’s Edo period—to make this sake cup. Written in an unorthodox style, the cup’s inscription describes Rengetsu’s awe of nature as the moon accompanied her on a walk home.

One of a series of sculptural boxes, this Cryptic is made with Louise Nevelson’s signature material of wood and echoes the cellular units of the large sculptures for which she is best known. Filled with odd wooden pieces painted black with additions of brass, this alluring object feels akin to a keepsake or jewelry box. As a collection, these three works offer a space of contemplation around the meaningful objects we use in daily rituals.

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MARIANNE BRANDT
German, 1893–1983

*Tea Service: Tea Infuser (Pot), Creamer, Sugar Bowl, and Tray*
1924 (design, manufactured in 1924 or 1925)

Hand-wrought sterling silver and ebony
Anonymous Gift in memory of Liesl Landau
2006.19.1-4
SUSTENANCE

ŌTAGAKI RENGETSU
Japanese, 1791-1875

Sake Cup
1868

Glazed hand-built earthenware with incised calligraphic poem
Purchase, Brooks McCormick Jr. Fund
2000.8
LOUISE NEVELSON
American, born in Ukraine, 1899-1988

# 1886 Cryptic II
1968

Painted wood and brass
Gift of Lawrence B. Buttenwieser in memory of Dorothy F. Rodgers
1993.2a-b
YEESOOKYUNG
Korean, born 1963

*Translated Vase*
2007

Ceramic fragments, epoxy, and gold leaf
Purchase, Gift of Gay-Young Cho and Christopher Chiu in honor of Richard A. Born
2010.4
TESTIMONY

Artists have a keen ability to reflect the critical issues and realities of their time. Whether by capturing individual narratives, documenting current events, or speaking to societal conditions, artists employ testimony to render visible the often overlooked and pernicious structures that shape lived experiences. The objects gathered in this section highlight disparate modes of making, from the use of metaphor and semiotics to printmaking and documentary photography, and together expose systems of oppression and injustice. In doing so, these efforts at bearing witness manifest deeper forms of understanding and cultivate a wider reach of empathy.
LORNA SIMPSON
American, born 1960

Three Seated Figures
1989

Three dye diffusion color Polaroid prints, five engraved plastic plaques
Purchase, The Paul and Miriam Kirkley Fund for Acquisitions
2013.32a-h

"Who is listening, who is believing, who will be sympathetic?"
—Deborah Willis in Lorna Simpson (1992)

Waiting to be examined, a faceless woman, in a cotton shift dress with visible dark brown skin, kneels before the viewer. In three moments the same body creates different expressions of movement, with slight gestures of hand gently placed at the front, to the side of, and diagonal from her thighs. Plastic plaques with the quality of metal communicate institutional authority and challenge the meaning of the photographs by identifying the subject of examination in the third person.

Simpson’s use of serial photography, language, and clothing enacts the practice of looking at Black women. She explains, “Part of the work is the assumption that the narrative is about a singular individual experience, and I try to pull it out of that. The work is not me or my biography but something larger than my personal experience.” Giving testimony, Three Seated Figures reveals how race as a stereotype is constructed and asks who is paying attention to its effects on Black women.
An avowal against the ravages of war and the plight of the proletariat, Käthe Kollwitz’s work bears witness to and expresses the social misery and economic injustice suffered by the German working class around the early twentieth century. Striving both to evoke compassion and drive societal change, she created her powerfully emotive images through printmaking, an art form that allowed for reproduction and widespread circulation of her messages.

Kollwitz visualized the traumas of life under capitalism in numerous ways. Part of an international relief effort responding to a famine in the Volga region, Help Russia depicts hands rushing to the aid of an emaciated figure. A more forceful work, Storming the Gate illustrates a furious group of factory workers raging against the property of their oppressor during the Weavers’ Revolt of 1844. Meanwhile, Bust of a Working Woman with Blue Shawl and Woman with Folded Hands offer quieter, more intimate representations of tragedy and existential exhaustion.

1. Woman with Folded Hands (Frau mit übereinandergelegten Händen)
   1898 (plate, this impression printed after 1931)
   Etching on wove paper
   Gift of Joseph V. and Brenda F. Smith, 2002.89

2. Bust of a Working Woman with Blue Shawl (Brustbild einer Arbeiterfrau mit blauem Tsch)
   1903
   Three-color lithograph on wove paper
   Gift of Joseph V. and Brenda F. Smith, 2002.90

3. Storming the Gate—Attack (Sturm)
   From the series: A Weavers’ Revolt 1843-1847
   Etching and roulette on wove paper
   Gift of Brenda F. and Joseph V. Smith, 2002.88

4. Charge (Losbruch)
   From the series: Peasant’s War 1902-1903 (plate, this impression 1921)
   Etching and roulette
   Gift of Edward Stowe Akeley, estate executed by his widow, 1995.31

5. Self-Portrait (Selbstbildnis)
   1934
   Lithograph (black) on heavy wove paper
   The Mary and Earle Ludgin Collection, 1981.143

6. Bread (Brot)
   1924
   Lithograph on wove paper
   Gift of the Estate of Ansgard Hess Rosenberg, 2009.25

7. Help Russia (Helft Russland)
   1921
   Lithograph on laid paper
   Gift of Perry Goldberg, 1983.173

8. Child’s Head (Lottie Nagel)
   (Kinderkopf (Lottie Nagel))
   1925 (stone, this impression printed after 1931)
   Lithograph on wove paper
   The Mary and Earle Ludgin Collection, 1981.123
ARTHUR SIEGEL
American, 1913-1978

Right of Assembly
1939

Gelatin silver print
Gift of the Estate of Lester and Betty Guttman
2014.723
BETHANY COLLINS
American, born 1984

A Pattern or Practice
2015

Blind-embossed Somerset paper
Purchase, The Paul and Miriam Kirkley Fund for Acquisitions
2019.3

Bethany Collins’s work explores themes of race and language, along with intersections therein, often through mining historical documents and archives. *A Pattern or Practice* consists of 91 blind-embossed prints reproducing pages from the U.S. Department of Justice’s investigative report on the Ferguson, Missouri, Police Department following the killing of Michael Brown by a police officer in 2014. Each delicately embossed sheet requires intimate proximity to read the protruding letters of the report, which is entirely present except for its conclusion.

By encouraging a moment of close and quiet meditation, *A Pattern or Practice* creates space for a dialogue on the pressing social issues of our time. Not only does Collins’s work promote introspection and analysis, but it also contributes to a larger conversation on the relationship between systemic racial injustice and violence.
COLLECTIVE CARE

Curator (from Latin: cura, meaning "to care"

What does care mean to you? Acknowledging the ways care can be specific and personal, this programming initiative, Collective Care, welcomes members of our communities to nominate artwork from the museum’s collection to be temporarily added to the exhibition on this rotating wall. Nominators are invited to collaborate with museum curators to select an artwork that affirms, elucidates, or demonstrates their own ideas around the forms and effects of care, as well as offer their own interpretation of the artwork. We invite you to return throughout the exhibition’s duration and follow activity on the museum’s website to see, hear, and learn new perspectives and reflections from our guest curators as they emerge.

Please join in and nominate an artwork by visiting smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/take-care or by speaking to the museum’s front desk attendant.
Read the Collective Care blog posts by visiting https://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/about/blog/category/122/Collective%20Care/
ECOLOGIES OF CARE

Life is interconnected and interdependent. These entangled relationships accentuate the ways care, or its absence, affect the natural world. To sustain and thrive, locally and globally, requires persistent tending and attention—and, often, a rethinking of preconceived systems of value. How can we reconsider which species are deemed invasive or native and how might that unlock their potential for sustainability? What forms of everyday maintenance often go unseen? In what ways do people divide, perceive, or take control of space? While some artworks in this section frame nature as a site of respite and wonder, others highlight human extractive relationships with the land. As climate change looms over our contemporary moment, care and caring are fundamental to maintaining the balance of our delicate ecosystem.
AMANDA WILLIAMS
American, born 1974

Color(ed) Theory Series
Each: 2014-2016, printed 2017

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT
Pink Oil Moisturizer
Loose Squares/Newport 100s
Safe Passage/Currency Exchange
Flamin’ Red Hots
BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT
Harold’s Chicken Shack
Ultrasheen
Crown Royal Bag

Color photographs, edition of 10
Purchase, The Paul and Miriam Kirkeby Fund for Acquisitions and Ann E. Ziegler
2018.51.7

Amanda Williams’s practice blurs the boundaries between art and architecture through works that employ color as a way to draw attention to the political complexities surrounding race, place, and value.

Color(ed) Theory is a series of photographs in which the artist and her collaborators painted eight vacant houses slated for demolition in the Englewood neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side—three miles west of the Smart Museum. Using vivid colors based on hues she identified in African American consumer culture, including Ultrasheen, Harold’s Chicken Shack, and Newport 100s, she marks the pervasive- ness of vacancy and blight in Black urban communi- ties. This body of work draws attention to racial inequalities in urban design and decay, and foregrounds the ongoing effects of deeply entrenched historic policies and practices, such as redlining, that have given Chicago its current configuration.
ECOLOGIES OF CARE

MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES
American, born 1939

JULIAN FLAVIN
Canadian, born 1990

WITH THE CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF STREETS AND SANITATION
Assisted by Tamer Hassan and Armin Hayrapetian

Chicago DSS: Division 7, Division 4, Division 2, Division 6
2019

Color video projection with sound, 71 min. 53 sec.
Courtesy the artists

“Our goal is to focus on work, to see work, to hear work. I don’t think people see maintenance work. Yet, if we care to stay here, this work of keeping the City will go on forever. It keeps the City alive.”
-Mierle Laderman Ukeles

This video contains voices that are both audible and inaudible. Audible portions are captioned in-video.
GABRIELE MÜNTER
German, 1877-1962

Fall Landscape, Study (Yellow Trees) (Herbstlandschaft, Studie [Gelbe Bäume])
circa 1911

Oil on paperboard
Gift of the Estate of Lester and Betty Guttman
2014.60

Painted during the years when Gabriele Münter was living in the Bavarian Alps, this work exemplifies her relationship with the natural world as a source of inspiration and respite. A founding member of the Blue Rider group of German Expressionists in Munich, the artist’s expressive use of color and dynamic forms turn this outdoor scene into an interior landscape of feeling, illustrating Münter’s deep, emotional connection to nature. She likely would have painted this vivid landscape outside, en plein air, surrounded entirely by the mountains, trees, and hillsides of her reverential composition.
THE DETROIT TREE OF HEAVEN WOODSHOP

Founded 2005

MICH COPE
American, born 1973

INGO VETTER
German, born 1968

ANNETTE WEISSER
German, born 1968

_DToHW: Letters from Detroit_ 2008

Chromogenic print framed in Tree of Heaven wood, stencil of Detroit Tree of Heaven Woodshop logo, various printed and organic materials
Purchase, The Paul and Miriam Kirkley Fund for Acquisitions 2010.94

Alanthus altissima, commonly known as tree of heaven, thrives in even the most toxic environments. While its curative properties are revered in traditional Chinese medicine, the plant is otherwise classified as an invasive species and a noxious weed. Artists Mitch Cope, Ingo Vetter, and Annette Weisser formed the Detroit Tree of Heaven Woodshop in order to explore the plant’s extreme survivability and natural grit by reframing this symbol of urban blight into a sustainable, cultivable crop. The artist collective purchased a vacant lot in Detroit and transformed the land into an urban farm. They established a grove of seedlings there to celebrate the tree, reclaim its presence as part of the community, and activate informal networks of craftspeople to utilize the resource. The collection of botanical samples, planning studies, drawings, and photographs on view are framed using the tree’s wood, alongside empty frames that await new documentation from the farm that will be sent to the Smart Museum over the tree’s 40-year lifespan.
Engage With Take Care At Home

Discover virtual programs and at-home activities, explore object chats, and browse writings, reflections, and performances from scholars, students, and others.

smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/take-care

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