



PREVIEW // ART + EXHIBITS

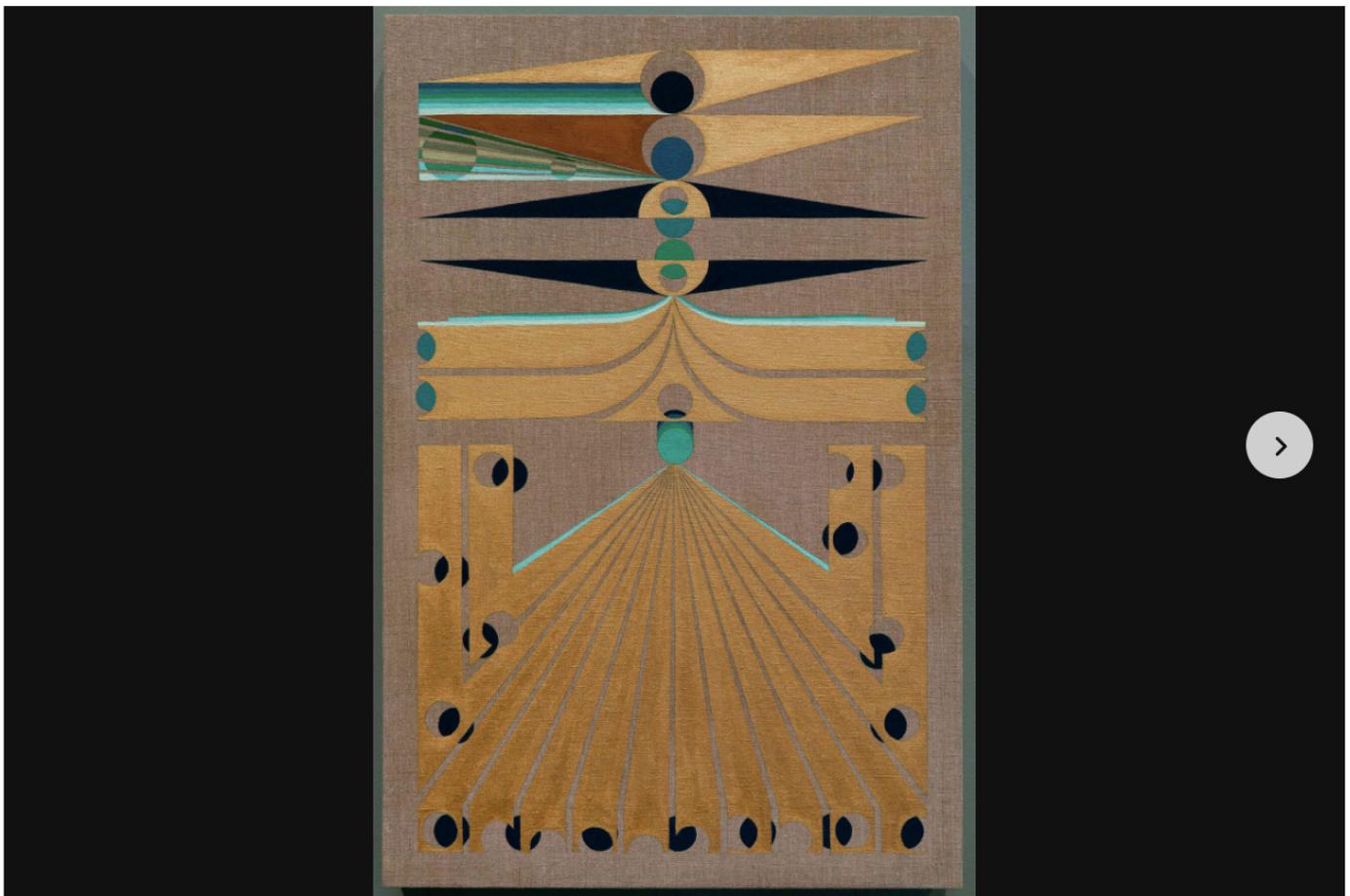
Union College's newly acquired art on display, fills gaps

Redressing biases of its collections leads to a consistent, striking exhibit



William Jaeger

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Eamon Ore-Giron, Infinite Regress CXLVII (variation I), 2021. 24 color print on Colorplan paper.

William Jaeger

Any show titled “Recent Acquisitions” has to sound a bit dull on the surface, lacking curatorial edge. But the yearlong exhibit with that very title at Mandeville Gallery unveils more than 30 works of real interest at Union College.

It also turns out the show has hidden consistency, favoring cultural or figurative meaning, with many works by artists described in the catalog as: “African, African American, Asian, Indigenous Alaskan, and Native American.” Redressing the gaps and biases of permanent collections worldwide is thankfully au courant, and Union is doing its part.

We might start with a large, complex woodcut by Katrina Andry so outlandishly titled it can’t be printed in this newspaper, though I can give the first half: “The Jungle Bunny Gave You Fever. The Only Cure is to....” The work features a figure in the middle, hands on hips, with a snake around the neck like a boa and a wrap around the waist made of palm leaves and bananas. Two other figures cower below, crying out in apparent sexual desperation.

This seems to be about power, and a reversal of power, with satiric disdain for stereotypes that need reconfiguring. The hard, rough line work and rich colors on a white ground give everyone gritty animation.

There are a number of provocative and declarative works on paper here, from an Afro-Futurist digital print portrayal to some playfully expressive chine collé lithographs about Native American identity, from a straight ahead, mid-Century black and white photographic portrait of a Malian woman to a recent, reconfigured pigment view of a Black man with added diamond dust and flocking.

Prints representing a myriad of processes dominate the show because they are presumably common throughout the Union College Permanent Collection—prints tend to be more affordable—but many are vigorous and distinctive, with heavily worked surfaces. There are one-of-a-kind pieces, as well, from mixed media works to paintings.

A question might arise for the curious: why are certain artists collected and not others? Even after a college decides it wants to strategically broaden its representation of artists by background and by the cultural content, and to bolster the school’s teaching initiatives, a world of options remains. How can one decide if a work truly good? And then, if the work is relevant now, will it be relevant in a century?

Great collections, small or large, prove their mettle by showing foresight. And that’s hard, certainly hard to know as it is happening. But it strikes me there are a number of pieces here with impact that will last, with qualities of craft and depth that are not playing to the moment but to something that can cross decades and generations.

Thinking along these lines, Didier William’s collage and ink “M’ap manje Kochon Sa a,” representing Haitian culture, has power, depth, and tactile finesse. The highly intricate pigment print scrolls, “Modern Gods,” by

English artist Sam Winston, though a bit out of place in this show, play with delicate geometric textures made out of tiny letters and words, coded with commentary about wealth. Likewise, works by Katrina Andry, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, and David Shrobe all mine the cultural currents of our time while conjuring up visual and technical excellence that ought to hold its own years from now.

In the end, it's also comforting that artworks by some of our contemporary artists don't get deep-sixed when they go into archival boxes in climate controlled storage. Instead, they sometimes make into an exhibition simply called, "Recent Acquisitions."

Written By [William Jaeger](#)

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