

A Beacon to the World:

Art from the Sylvia Smith Lewis '74 and Byron E. Lewis Sr. Collection

SCMA

February 23 – October 6, 2024



Introduction

In December 2023, Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and her husband, Byron E. Lewis Sr., donated three dozen artworks to SCMA. Lifelong supporters of Black artists, the Lewises built a major collection of modern and contemporary art. Unlike the majority of collectors and museums in the United States—who, until recently, ignored or marginalized work by Black artists—the Lewises have always championed the immense creativity and talent of these artists whose friendship they enjoyed and whose art they collected.

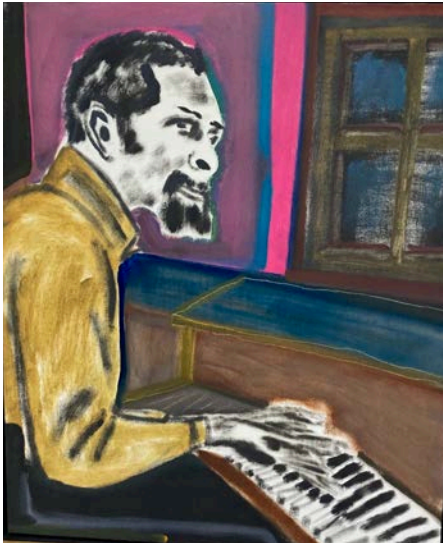
This gallery displays a selection of work from the Lewises' gift to SCMA. In exhibiting these artworks, we celebrate their vision as collectors and recognize the trust they have placed in each of us—staff and visitors alike—to care for, and learn from, these works in perpetuity. Welcome.

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Fred Brown
American, 1945–2012
Muhai Richard Abrams. 2002
Oil on linen
Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.

Frederick Brown's portrait of Muhai Richard Abrams is one of many portraits the artist did of blues and jazz musicians. He depicts the renowned pianist and composer as a young man. The neon pink and blue background and earth tones of Abrams' turtleneck and the piano he plays contrast with the black and white paint Brown uses for his face and hands. His fingers fly across the keys as if one with the instrument.



Spencer Lawrence
American, born 1951
Bashan. 1988
Etching on medium thick, slightly textured warm white paper
Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.

Trained at the School of Visual Arts in New York and the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Spencer Lawrence creates varied works that capture the extraordinary lives of Black Americans. Ranging from his ongoing portrait series of musicians (The Blues Series) to this tender image of his son at the age of six, Lawrence's portraits capture the individuality of his sitters. Lawrence studied with printmaker Bob Blackburn and later made this etching at Blackburn's community printmaking facility, The Printmaking Workshop in New York.

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Gerald Jackson

American, born 1936

Untitled. 1990

Pastel

Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.

After relocating from the South Side of Chicago to New York's Lower East Side in 1963, Gerald Jackson joined a community of vanguard artists and jazz musicians. In this work, Jackson uses distinct colors to fuse background, instruments and people together. He captures the energy of a jazz performance in bold, gestural strokes.



Fred Brown

American, 1945–2012

Portrait of Byron Lewis. 1991

Oil on linen

Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.

This portrait is one of two that Frederick Brown painted of his longtime friend Byron E. Lewis. Born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1931, Lewis transformed American culture through his work in advertising, cultural organizations, politics and media. In addition to founding UniWorld Group, which grew into a multinational advertising company, Lewis also created *The Urbanite*, a publication whose contributors included James Baldwin, and *Sounds of the City*, the first Black radio soap opera in the United States. Painted with Brown's characteristic bold outlines, flat background and careful attention to the face, this canvas depicts a dapper and tuxedo-clad Lewis in the prime of a career dedicated to, as he put it, "changing the image of Black people in American life."

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Bob Blackburn and The Printmaking Workshop

Robert Hamilton “Bob” Blackburn (1920–2003) was a pivotal figure in postwar American printmaking. His artistic talents were nurtured by the rich artistic scene of Harlem in the early 1930s. He first studied lithography with Riva Helfond at the Harlem Community Art Center, an important center of printmaking for the Works Progress Administration, the government-backed program that supported artists and others through the Depression. He deepened his studies of printmaking at the Art Students League and opened The Printmaking Workshop in New York 1948. Blackburn’s radical vision for The Printmaking Workshop was to make printmaking accessible to as many artists as possible. Still in operation, The Printmaking Workshop is the oldest and longest-running community print shop in the United States.



Nanette Carter

American, born 1954

Linear Winds. 1990

from the portfolio *Etched, Drawn, and Embossed*. 1989

Etching on medium thick, slightly textured warm white paper

Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.

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Linda Whitaker
American, born 1953
Night Moves. 1990
from the portfolio *Etched, Drawn, and Embossed*
Etching on medium thick, slightly textured warm
white paper
Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron
E. Lewis Sr.



Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson
American, 1940–2015
Mud Vision. 1990
from the portfolio *Etched, Drawn, and Embossed*
Etching on medium thick, slightly textured warm
white paper
Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron
E. Lewis Sr.



Joanne McFarland
American, born 1955
Las Cruces. 1990
from the portfolio *Etched, Drawn, and Embossed*
Etching on medium thick, slightly textured warm
white paper
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	<p>Kabuya Pamela Bowens-Saffo American, 20th century <i>Fountainhead Rejuvenation</i> from the portfolio <i>Etched, Drawn, and Embossed</i>. 1991 Etching, surface roll and chine collé on medium thick, slightly textured warm white paper Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.</p>
	<p>Horatio Hung-Yan Law American, born Hong Kong, 1963 <i>Still Water</i>. 1990 from the portfolio <i>Etched, Drawn, and Embossed</i> Collotype on medium thick, slightly textured warm white paper Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.</p>
	<p>Ronald Trujillo American, born 1951 <i>Shelter</i>. 1989 from the portfolio <i>Etched, Drawn, and Embossed</i> Lithograph on medium thick, slightly textured warm white paper Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.</p>

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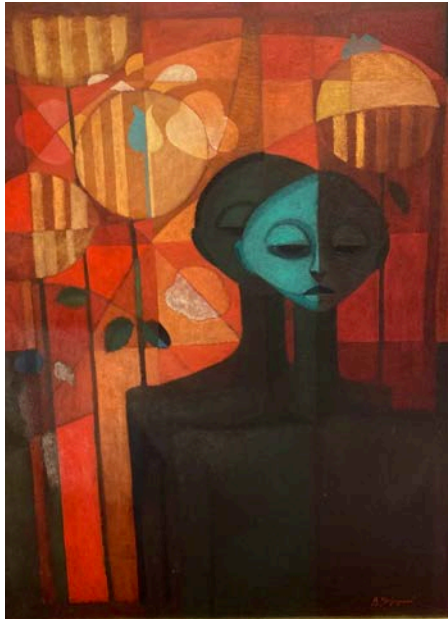
	<p>Kamin Lertchaipresert Thai, born 1964 <i>Did You Eat Art Yet?</i>.1990 from the portfolio <i>Etched, Drawn, and Embossed</i> Etching on medium thick, slightly textured cream-colored Rives BFK paper Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.</p>
	<p>Richard J. Watson American, born 1946 <i>Maxine</i>. 1976 Oil on canvas Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.</p> <p>“Most of my works are supported by memories of the past and suggested realities. Issues of social politics, ancestral references, and astral projections are presented with fragmented elements of “real life” collaged and collapsed, as dreams are prone to do.” —Richard J. Watson</p> <p>Originally from Badin, North Carolina, Richard J. Watson has lived in Philadelphia since the late 1950s. A participant in the Black Arts Movement and the Civil Rights Movement, Watson has long combined art and activism in his work, including as a founding member of the New Freedom Theater of Philadelphia. In this painting, he places the titular Maxine, shown in profile, in a bright, dreamlike space. Her gaze focuses ahead as wing-like shapes extend from her back.</p>

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Bernard Séjourné
Haitian, 1939/47–1994
Untitled. 1971
Acrylic on canvas
Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.

Born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Bernard Séjourné studied art in the city's Academie des Beaux-Arts; the School of Arts and Crafts in Kingston, Jamaica; and the Art Students League in New York. In this painting, Séjourné creates an image that is at once figurative and abstract. He uses bright reds, oranges and blues to render circles, rectangles and botanical motifs behind a doubled human figure. Partially obscured by shadow and facing the viewer, the figures' elongated necks and teal color echo the shape of the blue and yellow tulip in the upper left, creating a set of formal resonances throughout the canvas.



Richmond Barthé
American, 1901–1989
Head of a Dancer (Harald Kreutzberg). 1935
Bronze
Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.

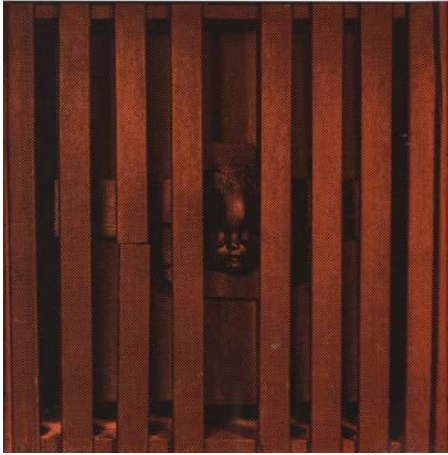
Richmond Barthé and Harald Kreutzberg, the Czech-German dancer whose likeness this sculpture captures, became friends in New York in the 1930s. Barthé, who was part of the Harlem Renaissance, enjoyed immense success in the 1930s and 1940s before moving to Jamaica, where he lived for twenty years. Here, Barthé chooses not to depict the entire body of a dancer known for his theatrical performances; instead, he creates a portrait whose closed eyes and slight tilt of head emphasize Kreutzberg's control and focus.

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Daniel LaRue Johnson
American, 1938-2017
Break Away (Red and Black). 1965
Screenprint on thick smooth paper
Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.

In the early 1960s, Daniel LaRue Johnson began creating three-dimensional dioramas to address racial injustices. Here, Johnson creates a box that resembles a jail cell, with vertical bars that partially obscure a mounted, seemingly floating doll head on the inside. The missing bar in the middle adds to the ambiguity of the scene. Is the figure inside trapped or breaking out?



Betty Blayton-Taylor
American, 1937-2016
From the Garden of Isis. 1989
Collotype monoprint on medium thick, slightly textured cream-colored paper
Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.

Betty Blayton-Taylor was an artist best known for her abstract works and critical role in supporting the arts in Harlem and New York at large. As a founding member of the Studio Museum in Harlem, Blayton-Taylor paved the way for Black artists to exhibit their work at a time when they were excluded from most museums.

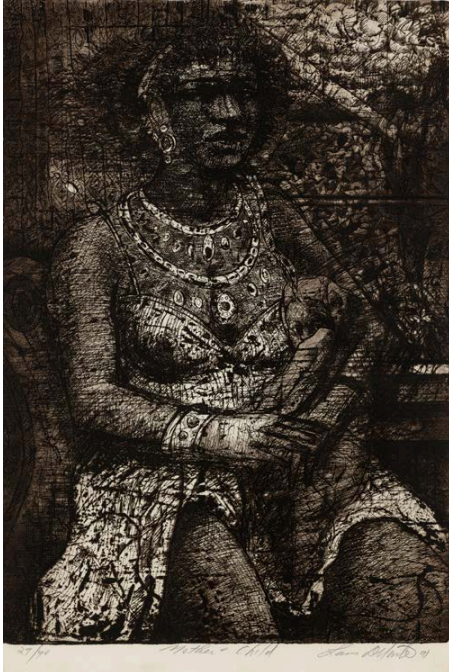
From the Garden of Isis refers to Isis, a central deity in Egyptian mythology who parallels Eve in the Garden of Eden. Blayton-Taylor expertly layers ovals, rectangles and triangles on top of each other to resemble vases of flowers.

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Louis Delsarte
American, 1944–2020
Mother and Child, 1991
from the portfolio *Etched, Drawn, and Embossed*
Soft-ground etching on medium thick, slightly
textured warm white paper
Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron
E. Lewis Sr.



Romare Bearden's *Odysseus Suite*

Images related to travel and travelers played an important role in Romare Bearden's art from his early beginnings. Born in Charlotte, North Carolina, the artist and his family moved to Harlem when he was a young child, part of the large-scale migration of African Americans from the South.

These three prints from Bearden's *Odysseus Suite* portray scenes from the ancient Greek poet Homer's epic work *The Odyssey*, which charts the travels of the hero Odysseus as he overcomes a series of obstacles on his journey home.

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Romare Bearden

American, 1911–1988

Cattle of the Sun God from the *Odysseus Series*.
1979

Screenprint printed in color on medium thick,
smooth cream-colored Lana paper

Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron
E. Lewis Sr.

Cattle of the Sun God depicts a scene where
Odysseus and his companions kill and eat livestock
belonging to the sun god Helios, who destroys
their ship and kills Odysseus's crew as retribution.



Romare Bearden

American, 1911–1988

Siren's Song from the *Odysseus Series*. 1979

Screenprint printed in color on medium thick,
smooth cream-colored Lana paper

Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron
E. Lewis Sr.

Siren's Song shows Odysseus bound to the mast of
his ship so that he can withstand the song of the
Sirens, mythical women who seek to lure sailors to
their deaths on the rocks.

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Romare Bearden

American, 1911–1988

Odysseus Leaves Nausicaa from the *Odysseus Series*. 1979

Screenprint printed in color on medium thick, smooth cream-colored Lana paper

Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.

In *Odysseus Leaves Nausicaa*, Odysseus bids farewell to the princess Nausicaa, who has helped him on his journey.