Dear Members,

I want to welcome you to 2021! A new year always brings a chance for renewal and reinvigoration. I know that our entire Ringling family is breathing a sigh of relief as 2020 moves into the rear view mirror. Your museum and her staff have stood strong through the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in an unprecedented closure of the museum and furloughs for some staff members. I am very proud of the manner in which the museum’s staff have pulled together and taken care of each other through this tumultuous time. Your continued support means more now than ever before and I greatly appreciate your membership, donations, and attendance.

The new year also brings some wonderful opportunities to experience The Ringling—both in person and virtually. We have several exciting and poignant exhibitions opening. One of the museum’s favorite paintings will be displayed in Frans Hals: Detecting a Decade, opening February 14. The Ringling’s portrait of Pieter Jacobsz. Olycan, executed about 1639, will be displayed side-by-side with a second portrait by Hals of Olycan (private collection), painted about ten years earlier. Through close examination and comparison of these two portraits of the same person, the exhibition will shed light on Hals’s revolutionary painting technique, and will explain how his work evolved over the decade of the 1630s.

On February 21 The Ringling will open Sam Gilliam: Selections, an exhibition drawn primarily from local collections in the Sarasota/Manatee area. Gilliam is one of the most significant abstract painters of the last 60 years. Through unique works and limited edition prints, the exhibition demonstrates the artist’s extraordinary experimentation and expansion of the boundaries of painting.

Saitō Kiyoshi: Graphic Awakening will open March 14. Saitō Kiyoshi (1907–1997) is one of the best-known Japanese print artists of the twentieth century. This beautiful exhibition will present recent donations of artworks from Charles and Robin Citro. This is the first comprehensive exhibition of this artist’s work in the United States. While we hope to see you all in person during 2021, we understand if that is not possible and look forward to seeing you at our virtual programs and events.

We hope you enjoy this digital edition of The Ringling Magazine. Throughout, you will discover clickable content that will allow you to explore beyond the surface of the page. Contact us at info@ringling.org.

Steven High
Executive Director

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In February, visitors to The Ringling will have an opportunity to delve into the painting technique of one of the greatest portraitists of the Dutch Baroque period, Frans Hals (1582/83 – 1666). Few painters from before the 19th century are more closely associated with a distinctive technique than Hals: his virtuosic handling of paint—with loose, highly visible brushstrokes, seemingly dashed off with no effort at all—is the hallmark of his style. Through this animated, at times even rapturous technique, Hals attempted to capture in paint the spontaneity and essential vitality of his sitters. A new exhibition, Frans Hals: Detecting a Decade, organized by the Dallas Museum of Art, invites visitors to explore Hals’s technique as it developed over a single decade, at the high point of the artist’s career as a portraitist.

Designed to encourage close viewing and comparison, the exhibition will feature two images by Hals of the same sitter, Pieter Jacobsz. Olycan (1572-1658), painted at the beginning and end of the 1630s. Olycan was a wealthy brewery owner and important civic leader who served multiple times as Burgomaster (Mayor) of the Dutch city of Haarlem, where Hals was the leading portrait painter. Olycan’s likeness is well known to Ringling visitors, thanks to John Ringling’s purchase in 1927 of the museum’s Hals, painted about 1639. The Ringling’s painting will be displayed side-by-side with an earlier portrait of Olycan by Hals, on loan from a private collection, dated to about 1630. Didactic panels in the gallery will help visitors engage in comparisons between the two paintings, highlighting differences in Hals’s materials and approach over the decade of the 1630s.

This type of exhibition, which focuses our attention on just two works, is a rare kind of viewing opportunity. As we take time to compare the two paintings, our eyes see ever more subtle distinctions between them. I recommend, if possible, that viewers experience the exhibition more than once, as each visit will undoubtedly reveal new insights into Hals’s remarkable technique.

Frans Hals: Detecting a Decade was organized by the Dallas Museum of Art.

by Sarah Cartwright
Ulla R. Searing Curator of Collections


Frans Hals, Pieter Jacobsz. Olycan, about 1639. Oil on canvas, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Bequest of John Ringling, 1936. SN251
by Rhiannon Paget
Curator of Asian Art

Saitō Kiyoshi’s (1907–1997) keen sense of design, superb technique, and engagement with an appealing variety of themes made him one of the best-known Japanese print artists of the 20th century. A gift of over 100 prints from Robyn and Charles Citrin has made The Ringling one of the largest public collections of Saitō’s art in the United States. In March 2021, The Ringling will open the major exhibition, Saitō Kiyoshi: Graphic Awakening.

Saitō grew up in northern Japan. After finishing high school, he made signs for storefronts before moving to Tokyo to pursue an artistic career in 1931. Unable to afford art school, he supported himself through graphic design work and illustration, and painted by night.

In the mid-1930s, Saitō taught himself how to make woodblock prints. Through his work as an illustrator, he met Onchi Kōshirō (1891–1955), a key figure of the modernist sōsaku hanga (creative print) movement, in which artists claimed complete authorship of their work by carving and printing their own designs. Onchi drew Saitō into his circle of experimental printmakers, but his breakthrough did not come until after the war, under the patronage of Western art patrons, he turned his gaze to Japan’s heritage sites. His prints that followed interpreted architectural subjects through the lens of modernist aesthetics, as shown by his Mondrian-esque design of Katsura Imperial Villa (fig. 4).

New diplomatic ties between the U.S. and Japan provided the opportunity and means for Saitō to go abroad. In 1956, he travelled to U.S. and Mexico, exhibiting, sketching, teaching, and broadening his audience. Later, he traveled to Europe and depicted the lively urban scenery of Paris (fig. 5).

But it was places closer to home that most captivated his imagination. His largest body of work and signature theme was Winter in Aizu, monochromatic landscapes and village scenes of his birthplace in the snow country of northern Japan. Between 1938 and his death in 1997, Saitō made over 125 unique designs featuring Aizu blanketed in snow, as well as dozens of ink paintings. We are fortunate to be able to show two of his earliest iterations of this theme and a painting, generously lent from private collections (fig.6).

The exhibition is accompanied by a 200-page, fully illustrated catalog edited by Dr. Rhiannon Paget, The Ringling’s curator of Asian art, and published by Scala. Additional essays by Professor Noriko Kuhara (Seitoku University) and Dr. Judith A. Stubbs (Sidney and Lois Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University) elucidate key themes of Saitō’s life and work, while a comprehensive photo essay by woodblock print artist Mr. Paul Binnie demonstrates Saitō’s idiosyncratic technique.

DISCOVER MORE @ ringling.org
Sam Gilliam is one of the most important abstract artists working today. He will have a career retrospective, at the age of 87, in 2022 at the Smithsonian Institution Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC. Known for his experimental exploration of materials and constant invention, Gilliam first came to critical attention in the 1960s as a later member of the Washington Color School. To emancipate his art from constraints, Gilliam infused his appreciation of blues and jazz improvisation to be conceptualized in abstraction. His radical freedom to express spontaneity when working with materials created the first of his important “drape” paintings in the late 1960s that he would continue to explore throughout his career. By removing the canvas from the traditional stretcher, Gilliam created innovative work that was both painting and sculpture. His installation of the “drape” works filled galleries with painted canvases suspended off the walls or from the ceilings and often draped over objects such as sawhorses or ladders. These pieces encouraged improvisation because they could not be hung in the same manner twice.

He quickly expanded beyond the Color School tradition with his fierce experimentation in the use of color and materials. As an African American artist working during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, Gilliam was influenced by the social and political activism of the period. His piece Red April documents, with bold colors, the country’s shocked reaction and mourning following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968.

Following his invention of the “drape” works, Gilliam continued his experimentation with materials and fabrication with paintings on birch, collages composed of cut-up painted canvas, and polypropylene works adhered to birch panels. In the 1970s, he was influenced by the jazz artistry of John Coltrane and Miles Davis and again used improvisation in the formation of his geometric collages. Although he did not align neatly with the ideology of the Black Arts Movement to produce art that represented black social issues, Gilliam used his abstraction as an activist tool to educate museums in diversity.

Intertwined with his phenomenal object making, Gilliam experimented throughout his career with the process of making prints. Collaborating with renowned printmakers like Lou Stovall in D.C. or art presses such as Tandem Press in Madison, Wisconsin, Gilliam’s prints were integral and influential to his entire creative process. He continues to inspire contemporary artists with his techniques and values teaching and mentoring.

This exhibition brings together nearly 20 unique works and limited edition prints by Gilliam from the early 1970s to 2010. The exhibition demonstrates the technical and visual experimentation of the artist and shows how he often circles back to incorporate earlier styles. We extend our thanks to the nine generous collectors who have graciously agreed to lend their works for the exhibition. This exhibition is the first in a series of small focus collections highlighting the collectors in our region. We could not think of a better way to launch this intermittent series than with the work of Sam Gilliam.

Sam Gilliam, Green Wave, 1999. Acrylic on birch plywood with metal frame and piano hinges, 86 1/2 x 83 x 2 in. Private Collection, Sarasota.
CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF THE HOWARD BROS. CIRCUS MODEL
by Jennifer Lemmer Posey
Tibbals Curator of Circus

Fifteen years ago, the Howard Bros. Circus came to town and forever changed the way that The Ringling shares the history of America’s greatest amusement institution. The miniature made its Sarasota debut in January 2006 as the cornerstone exhibit in the newly opened Tibbals Learning Center. Since opening day, millions of visitors have marveled at the complexity of the traveling tented circus and at the intricacy and craftsmanship of the model.

Circus Historian and Modelmaker Howard Tibbals and a small group of dedicated staff and volunteers spent months preparing for and installing the miniature. Built at a scale of 1/16th life size, Howard’s extraordinary craftsmanship assured that the model functioned much like the actual circus. Every piece of equipment, from the folding chairs to trunks of wardrobe, was packed into the miniature wagons. When the model first arrived at the museum in June of 2005, the wagons, loaded with equipment, were set onto the flatbed railroad cars in the railyard, awaiting their turn to be offloaded on the lot.

Few people realize that the exceptional details and precision handiwork extend even to spaces that cannot be seen. Inside the Red Ticket Wagon on the midway are cabinets and drawers filled with miniature ticket rolls and money. Inside the dining tent every table is set with individually placed china and flatware. The food on the plates was carefully placed so that every meal is individualized. None of these pieces are glued down.

Howard Tibbals’ earliest experience of seeing the massive canvas city of the circus sparked a lifelong pursuit to document and preserve circus history through assembling an unparalleled collection of circus material and building The Howard Bros. Circus Model. Those collections have continued to inspire Howard and his modelmaking. Since it opened in 2006, thousands of pieces, crafted by Howard and a small group of talented volunteers, have been added to the model. From railroad cars to a bicycle tent or unique new performers in the circus backyard, the additions continue the tradition of bringing the historic circus to life in miniature!

LARRY RIVERS: BOSTON MASSACRE FROM THE RINGLING’S COLLECTION
by Ola Wlusek,
Keith D. and Linda L. Monda Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art

On March 5, 1770, British Army soldiers fired their muskets into a crowd of civilians gathered on the streets of Boston, killing five colonists and changing the course of American history. To mark the bicentennial of this infamous event, artist Larry Rivers, known as one of the founders of Pop Art, created Boston Massacre (1970), a portfolio of thirteen mixed media prints. In a postmodern aesthetic, the images loaded with bright colors, striking figures, and accompanying text commemorate the fraught episode deemed as a precursor to the American Revolution.

When working on his embossed and collaged screen prints, Rivers looked to Paul Revere’s hand-colored engraving titled The Bloody Massacre from 1770. Although one of the first people killed in the skirmish was Crispus Attucks, a young dockworker of African and Native American descent, no one who fits that description appears in Revere’s famous print. In Boston Massacre, Rivers uses visual clues from print media, such as newspaper photographs, to reimagine and memorialize Attucks’ presence at this historic event.
Beginning this winter and continuing through spring, For Real This Time will offer a contemplative space for reflection on work by some of the most thoughtful and visionary artists working in film and video today. Presented in the Monda Gallery for Contemporary Art, the exhibition embraces an experimental format displaying video by each artist in a stand-alone presentation for a period of three weeks; it is an invitation for a deeper consideration of the unique subject matter explored in the work while exposing a wider thematic arch as a whole. Together, the seven works examine the current state of the American society and pose uncomfortable yet vital questions about personal and collective attitudes towards issues of race and inequality.

In her monologue sum of the parts: what can be named (2010), Deanna Bowen relates the arduous journey of the Bowen family from its earliest documented history in Clinton, Jones County, Georgia in 1815. By sharing the fragmented account, Bowen reconstructs Black history while challenging the integrity of the archive as a biased site of historical records. Similarly, Kara Walker draws from the U.S. National Archives on the War Department’s Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, established in 1865 to aid former slaves in the transition to freedom following the Civil War. National Archives Microfilm Publication M999 Roll 34. Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, established in 1865 to aid former slaves in the transition to freedom following the Civil War.

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In 2020, The John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art received a number of important donations of studio glass from Sarasota collectors, Warren and Margot Coville, and Philip and Nancy Kotler, who have been long-time supporters of The Ringling. These gifts substantially enhance the Museum’s holdings of contemporary art in glass, enabling the Ringling to explore a range of aesthetic and conceptual approaches created through a variety of glassworking techniques. Works by Matt Eskuche, Dante Marioni, Debora Moore, Charles Parnott, Lino Tagliapietra, Mary Shaffer, and others are a welcome and significant addition to the Museum’s collection of 20th and 21st century glass. Let’s take a closer look at a selection of the recent gifts that are currently on view in the Kotler-Coville Glass Pavilion.

Rose Dress by Karen LaMonte (fig. 1) and Sleep by Christina Bothwell (fig. 2) are among the figural works in glass sculpture donated by the Kotlers, reflecting the collectors’ interest in narrative and figural art. Next time you visit the Kotler-Coville Glass Pavilion, take a moment to visually compare the two works. These offer an interesting dialogue between the artists’ approaches to cast glass and depictions of the female form. In Bothwell’s mixed-media work, a woman appears to be both sleeping and sitting up, representing the body and soul. This work is inspired by her mysterious experience of feeling as though she lifted out of her physical body as she fell asleep during her sleep-deprived pregnancy. Rose Dress, on the other hand, has subverted the long tradition of the female nude in art by casting a life-size dress standing upright with the wearer absent. LaMonte’s work explores ideas about female beauty through a sartorial lens with remarkable detail of both clothing and the female body, which is subtly sculpted within the translucent glass.

The collection has been strengthened by the addition of a number of works by contemporary studio glass artists who have creatively taken centuries-old techniques in glassmaking in new directions. A Vase by Richard Marquis (fig. 3) shows his bold adaptation of murrine, a Venetian technique using cross-sections of glass canes to create surface patterns. Marquis learned to master the technique at the famous Venini factory in Italy and for decades since has been incorporating murrine into spunky and irreverent forms, like this vase with all-over colorful squares with polka dots. Another colorful work to come into the collection is Yellow Heart Amulet Basket by Laura Donefer (fig. 4). This work’s bright yellow color is stunning to see in-person. Donefer created the array of glass beads and rods using a flameworking torch and assembled them into a blown-glass vessel as her contemporary version of apotropaic objects invested with protective powers, which have a history extending back to ancient cultures. The yellow color has additional meaning related to the artist’s discovery of relatives who perished in the Holocaust, and references Jews who were forced to wear a yellow Star of David under the Nazi regime. This work is meant to honor Holocaust survivors and the millions of lives lost, and also inspire hope with its beautiful coloration and intricacy.

We are thrilled to add these works to the Museum’s glass collection and hope that on your next visit to The Ringling, you will take a closer look and contemplate the beauty, complexity, and depth of meaning expressed in glass.
The Ringling’s Idea Team (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access) has been working for the past two years to make the museum a place where everyone feels that they belong. With the input of our staff, volunteers, and community, the IDEA Team created an equity statement for The Ringling. We are pleased to share it with you here.

As we navigate the current difficulties brought on by the pandemic, we know that some of our equity tactics can only be achieved in a post-COVID world. In the meantime, we are optimistic about our ability to begin shifting our institutional culture and deepening our community connections. We are well on our way toward a significant transformation, and we hope you will join us on this journey.

THE RINGLING EQUITY STATEMENT

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art inspires, educates, and entertains through arts and culture, and is a place that encourages creative ideas, innovative thinking, open dialogue, and meaningful exchange. When all people are included and see themselves reflected in our mission, we can transform our communities, our institutions, and our world into better places for everyone.

Societal inequities have shaped our field in ways that continue to impact it today, as evidenced by the limited engagement and representation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), Latinx and Hispanic people, and other marginalized groups. The Ringling believes that inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) are essential to its mission and vision. In our role as a cultural, educational, and civic leader, we have a moral obligation for our institution to include the diverse perspectives and narratives of people from the local to the global communities.

In looking to the future, we need to acknowledge our past as an institution where BIPOC and Latinx and Indigenous people were historically excluded. To this end, we believe that a focus on race equity is critical and serves as a starting point from which to address other forms of inequity. We understand that IDEA work is difficult, but we commit to keep learning, evolving, and improving on our journey to become an anti-racist institution.

Our Commitments

IDEA is critical to our work, our community, and our shared future. To actively dismantle systems of discrimination and exclusion, The Ringling commits to the following:

• Remove barriers to full inclusion of historically marginalized groups, with an emphasis on equity for BIPOC and Latinx and Indigenous communities
• Engage underrepresented artists and organizations through exhibitions, performances, programs, and collaborations that reflect and celebrate the diversity of our local, regional, national, and global communities
• Improve organizational ability to attract, welcome, and serve a diverse audience and membership
• Ensure The Ringling’s board, staff, and volunteers reflect our diverse communities
• Center the voices of people of diverse cultures, backgrounds, abilities, and identities
• Provide resources, training, tools, and space for learning together

MEMBER EVENTS

In September 2020, we launched a new Member benefit, Member Mornings! Members-only are invited to The Ringling from 9:00 – 10:00 AM on Thursdays to view one of our amazing venues before the museum opens to the public! The Museum Store and the recently re-opened Mable’s Coffee and Tea will also be open to Members. For a schedule of open venues, please visit ringling.org/events/member-mornings.

Join us on Ca’ d’Zan Terrace for relaxing evenings of music at Members & Music on Ca’ d’Zan! This Member-only event will be held on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of the month and will feature live acoustic music along with brief remarks from Ringling staff. For your enjoyment, the first floor of Ca’ d’Zan will be open for self-touring. For more information, visit ringling.org/events/members-music-ca-dzan.

WE APPRECIATE YOUR PATIENCE!

We anticipate delays in the Membership department due to staff furloughs and apologize for any inconvenience. Members are welcome to renew their membership online, by phone, or mail, however please be aware processing time may be longer than usual. We encourage you to renew your membership in person in the John M. McKay Visitors Pavilion at the Members Desk for immediate processing.

NEED TO CHECK YOUR MEMBERSHIP STATUS OR EXPIRATION DATE?

2. Click the red “Account Sign-In” button.
3. Enter the email associated with your membership account, and password and click “Sign in”.
4. Near the top of the screen you will see the text “Signed in as:” followed by your email. Click your email.
5. This will bring you to a screen displaying your current membership status.

Thank you for continuing to support The Ringling!

SUPPORTING, PARTNER, AND CIRCLE EVENTS

VIRTUAL COFFEE AND CONVERSATION
with Executive Director, Steven High
THU, JAN 14, 9:00 AM
THU, APR 22, 9:00 AM
Join Executive Director Steven High for an update on The Ringling.

CIRCLE MEMBER EVENTS

VIRTUAL CONVERSATION
with Curators of Skyway 2020–2021: A Contemporary Collaboration
THU, JAN 14, 5:30 PM
Join us for a virtual discussion with the curators of the upcoming exhibition Skyway 20/21: A Contemporary Collaboration. Curators from Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art; Tampa Museum of Art; and University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum will share insight about their curatorial process and provide context for the diversity of art produced in the Tampa Bay region.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Frans Hals: Detecting a Decade
WED, FEB 17, 4:00 PM
Join Dr. Sarah Cartwright for an informal presentation about the Dutch Baroque painter Frans Hals and his two portraits of Pieter Jacobsz. Olycan. Image courtesy of Dallas Museum of Art.

EXHIBITION DINNER

Saitō Kiyoshi: Graphic Awakening
WED, MAR 31, 6:00 PM
Join Dr. Rhiannon Paget as we explore the first comprehensive exhibition of this artist’s work in the United States, featuring recent donations from Charles and Robyn Citrin.
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
Janet Andres
John and Virginia Harshman

In 1992, two individuals became new members at the museum. Twenty-seven years later, they are still enthralled by the beauty and majesty that is The Ringling. Get to know Janet Andres and John Harshman.

Janet Andres, a former Foreign Service agent, has been a member for 27 years and a long-serving volunteer as well. John Harshman, owner of a local commercial real estate company that bears his name also joined in 1992. Married to Ringling Marketing staff member Virginia Harshman for 9 years, John and Virginia’s story is quite different than Janet’s but their love for The Ringling is based on similar reasons.

What inspires someone to be a member for 27 years? John truly believes that The Ringling is one of Sarasota’s treasures, something that helps him with his business as an asset to clients and business associates. John and Virginia love sharing the museum with friends and visitors from out of town. He enjoys pointing out that John Ringling, in addition to his circus, was also in the commercial real estate business, and the brilliant developer of St. Armand’s Circle and Longboat Key! Janet has been a longtime volunteer and loves serving as a docent in both Ca’ d’Zan and the MOA, a role she has missed terribly during this past year. She loves the honest and creative responses of children when looking at works of art, whereas adults hold back. A child quickly beams with excitement and passion when she asks what they think a work is trying to say. Janet has been a longtime volunteer and loves serving as a docent in both Ca’ d’Zan and the MDA, a role she has missed terribly during this past year. She loves the honest and creative responses of children when looking at works of art, whereas adults hold back. A child quickly beams with excitement and passion when she asks what they think a work is trying to say.

So what do they collect? John is a minimalist but collects books on history and good wine from Burgundy. For Janet, it is about memories and so photographs of places she has lived and visited bring those experiences to life. She leaves collecting art to those who know what they are doing. Janet has been a longtime volunteer and loves serving as a docent in both Ca’ d’Zan and the MDA, a role she has missed terribly during this past year. She loves the honest and creative responses of children when looking at works of art, whereas adults hold back. A child quickly beams with excitement and passion when she asks what they think a work is trying to say.

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MEMBERSHIP
In 1992, two individuals became new members at the museum. Twenty-seven years later, they are still enthralled by the beauty and majesty that is The Ringling. Get to know Janet Andres and John Harshman.

Janet Andres, a former Foreign Service agent, has been a member for 27 years and a long-serving volunteer as well. John Harshman, owner of a local commercial real estate company that bears his name also joined in 1992. Married to Ringling Marketing staff member Virginia Harshman for 9 years, John and Virginia’s story is quite different than Janet’s but their love for The Ringling is based on similar reasons.

What inspires someone to be a member for 27 years? John truly believes that The Ringling is one of Sarasota’s treasures, something that helps him with his business as an asset to clients and business associates. John and Virginia love sharing the museum with friends and visitors from out of town. He enjoys pointing out that John Ringling, in addition to his circus, was also in the commercial real estate business, and the brilliant developer of St. Armand’s Circle and Longboat Key! Janet has been a longtime volunteer and loves serving as a docent in both Ca’ d’Zan and the MOA, a role she has missed terribly during this past year. She loves the honest and creative responses of children when looking at works of art, whereas adults hold back. A child quickly beams with excitement and passion when she asks what they think a work is trying to say.

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So what do they collect? John is a minimalist but collects books on history and good wine from Burgundy. For Janet, it is about memories and so photographs of places she has lived and visited bring those experiences to life. She leaves collecting art to those who know what they are doing. Janet has been a longtime volunteer and loves serving as a docent in both Ca’ d’Zan and the MDA, a role she has missed terribly during this past year. She loves the honest and creative responses of children when looking at works of art, whereas adults hold back. A child quickly beams with excitement and passion when she asks what they think a work is trying to say.

What might these long-time members like to have as an additional benefit of membership? John has been intrigued with the recent opportunity provided by The UNGala Chance to Win and thinks that members would enjoy having more of this kind of unique opportunity on campus. As a volunteer and member, Janet feels she would like to see us offer more memberships to families that are underserved and those of color.
CARLOS ALFONZO
GULFSTREAM

by Ola Wlusek,
Keith D. and Linda L. Monda Curator of
Modern and Contemporary Art

Disenchanted with the Castro regime, Cuban artist Carlos Alfonzo immigrated to Miami during the Mariel boatlift of 1980, a traumatic journey by sea from the port of Mariel west of Havana. Precipitated by the ailing Cuban economy and political tension, Alfonzo, at thirty years old, escaped Cuba to seek freedom of personal and artistic expression, and to establish himself as a practicing artist in the United States.

Once in Miami, Alfonzo, who previously studied art and art history in Havana, continued to infuse his work with elements borrowed from Cubism, Surrealism, and Impressionism, spiritual iconography of African deities, and religious symbols from Catholicism. His exposure to abstraction of the New York School led Alfonzo to develop a deep connection to Expressionism, which informed his unique gestural style and a robust understanding of color theory.

Alfonzo’s refined abstract language is evident in Gulfstream (1988), a large-scale painting from the artist’s mature period, defined by a vivid color palette and a complex iconography based on his intense life experiences as a refugee and the socio-political circumstances of his time. The all-encompassing work appears to envision the turbulence of an ocean current and evokes the risk associated with migration. A closer study, however, reveals that the foaming spirals inspired by the eye of Saint Lucia are stand-ins for the chaos and human loss associated with the AIDS pandemic of the American society in the 1980s. The fragmented smiles and tongues pierced with daggers, a motif reoccurring throughout Alfonzo’s oeuvre, reference Santería, an Afro-Cuban folk religion based on the beliefs and customs of the Yoruba people. Gulfstream is a deeply psychological work informed by modern art and contemporary life, the artist’s own identity and battle with the virus, and his discerning reflections on the human condition.

Within the decade following his exile, Alfonzo was awarded a Visual Artist fellowship in Painting from the National Endowment of the Arts in Washington D.C. Today, his work forms part of the permanent collections of prestigious institutions, such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Hirshhorn Gallery and Sculpture Garden, and The Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Gulfstream is on view in Remaking the World: Abstraction from the Permanent Collection.
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