Happy New Year!

As 2021 moves into the rear view mirror, we are excited that you are with us as we roar into 2022! On behalf of the entire Ringling staff, I would like to thank you for your continued support and friendship over the last year. We have some incredible happenings planned for you in the coming months and I wanted to share a brief preview.

Proving once again that there is often more to art than meets the eye, Metadata: Rethinking Photography from the 21st century will open March 6. The term “metadata” is used to describe the information that travels with a digital image file but is unseen within the image itself. This data includes the details about the digital photograph’s creation, its ownership, and how it is situated within structures of order. Curated by Christopher Jones, Stanton B. and Nancy W. Kaplan Curator of Photography and Media Art, the exhibition features work from the past decade by an international selection of artists and visual activists that are working to make palpable the unseen information, or metadata, that undergirds the image regime.

In February, we will premier Eleanor Merritt: Remembrance. The exhibition, which runs from February 20 – August 21, is dedicated to celebrating the spirit and creativity of this remarkable African-American artist. Eleanor was a dedicated educator, museum volunteer, and well-respected artist and this exhibition presents examples of her work from the 1950s to 2018. It is our pleasure to share her works with our visitors and to announce that three pieces from the installation have entered The Ringling’s collection.

And finally, we are very excited to welcome a new permanent exhibit in the Tibbals Learning Center! The Greatest Show On Earth Gallery is a high-tech, interactive experience that continues the timeline of the circus, moving from 1969 to the present. The exhibit, prepared with the generous support of Feld Entertainment, will be sure to delight children of all ages!

We look forward to seeing you at The Ringling!

Steven High
Executive Director
The term “metadata” is used to describe the information that travels embedded within a digital image file. Data such as when and where a photo was taken, how many pixels it is composed of, details about what sort of device was used to create it, and how it has been used and modified are embedded in images, albeit typically unseen and secret when we view the content on their surfaces. In our networked digital environment, metadata is accessed by both human users and artificial intelligences. Software algorithms orchestrate what images we see and exchange while collecting the valuable data generated by our interactions. In our moment, dominated by image-based social media, the logic of algorithms, and automated surveillance, we are becoming increasingly aware that understanding the information that circulates unseen around photographic images, the metadata, is just as important as seeing what’s depicted on their surfaces. Metadata: Rethinking Photography from the 21st Century brings the work of nine U.S. and international contemporary artists to The Ringling, all of whom delve deeply into the ecology of the photographic image.

For several of the exhibition’s artists, the origins stories of photographic technologies and means of image production are the metadata revealed. Artistic collaborators Ali Feser and Jason Lazarus uncover the corporate history and social impact of Kodachrome in the 20th century in their multimedia gallery installation, Man and God. Mladen Bizumic also explores imaging technology’s history through his work MoMA’s Baby (2019) that incorporates personal narratives into a visualization of the invention of the digital scanner.

The artists Mohsen Azar and Penelope Umbrico both explore the ways in which our relationship to images has changed as social media and online sharing platforms become the main conduits through which we consume photographs. Azar exploits compression algorithms used by Instagram to subject traumatic, viral images to a process that deteriorates them over time, transforming them into digital abstractions. The millions of user-uploaded images on Flickr are source material for Umbrico who downloads them and prints them to create physical analogues of the online archive. Her work, often of repetitive imagery such as sunset portraits, allows us to see the social ritual that compels our image making.

Viktoria Binschtok uses Google as an unwitting collaborator, appropriates images from its street view and image search algorithms, and interweaves them with her own photographs, thereby creating new works that map the logic of automation on to physical space. Similarly interested in the intersect between digital and physical space, Lilly Lulay cuts into her photographs with the symbols and icons we use on our smartphones, creating circuit-like patterns that resemble intricate lacework.

The implications of the ever-increasing prevalence of machine vision, especially automated systems of facial recognition and automated surveillance, are the focus in the projects of three artists featured in the exhibition. For example, Joy Buolamwini, a computer scientist, digital activist, and self-described “poet of code” reveals through
her spoken-word video the racial and gendered biases that have been built into facial recognition systems. These systems are often a part of automated decision-making software, built in biases can bring real harm to marginalized communities. Trevor Paglen’s images further explore the rise of machine vision in an era in which the overwhelming majority of images are created by automated systems for the scrutiny of other machines. Paglen intersects himself into this world of operative images in order to show us what these machines “see.” Finally, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer opens up the possibilities of surveillance technology for purposes other than control. His interactive digital work Level of Confidence (2015) commemorates the 43 disappeared students who were the victims of a mass kidnapping in Iguala, Mexico, in 2014. This work brings us into a unique, one-on-one encounter with the victims through facial recognition software. Accompanying the exhibition is a 120-page illustrated catalogue published by Scala, featuring an essay by the exhibition curator, a guest essay by collaborating artist and scholar Ali Fesser, and conversations with the participating artists. The Ringling will host an artist panel discussion on March 5.

**FROM LEGEND TO HISTORY**

_Archaeology of the Underground Railroad in our Backyard_

This winter, The Ringling’s Community Gallery will feature From Legend to History: Archaeology of the Underground Railroad in our Backyard, curated by Uzi Baram, New College Professor of Anthropology and founding Director of the New College Public Archaeology Lab. We asked Professor Baram to provide an overview of his important work on the community of Angola.

**LET’S START WITH THE BASICS: WHAT IS ANGOLA?**

Starting in the 1770’s, freedom-seeking people started settling by the Manatee River. These were people of African heritage, either self-emancipated from enslavement or born free in Spanish La Florida. The community grew as refugees from military battles on the Apalachicola and Suwanee rivers looked for a haven of freedom and found it in a place that Cuban fishermen on the Gulf Coast called Angola and Sarrazota. The history, though, was erased but some remembered.

**WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED THERE?**

In 2004, a community scholar from Sarasota, Vickie Oldham, organized a multi-disciplinary research team to look for Angola. In January 2020, I led archaelogical excavations that uncovered evidence of the daily lives of the maroons of Angola by the Manatee Mineral Spring, now the eastern terminal of Bradenton’s Riverwalk. Angola is no longer legend but a history of freedom.

**WHAT EVIDENCE HAS BEEN UNCOVERED?**

The Angola community, at its height having about 700 people living in hamlets with cows, horses, pigs, chickens, and crops, stretched from the Manatee River to the Manatee Mineral Spring, now the eastern terminal of Bradenton’s Riverwalk. Angola is no longer legend but a history of freedom.

**WHAT DO YOU HOPE VISITORS WILL LEARN FROM THIS EXHIBITION?**

Sharing the history on the grounds where maroons once lived honors their memory. From Legend to History: Archaeology of the Underground Railroad in our Backyard, on view through February 28, is free for all visitors. Professor Baram will be giving a lecture about the project on January 24; visit ringling.org for more information.

Photos courtesy of Uzi Baram and New College of Florida
Ladies and Gentlemen, Children of All Ages...experience the thrill of seeing artists fly through the air, the joy of laughing at the antics of zany clowns, and the wonder of the spectacular productions and extraordinary performers of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey®,

The Greatest Show On Earth®!

In early 2022 the Circus Museum will open The Greatest Show On Earth Gallery. The exhibit continues the history of the circus in America and presents the story of how Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey has evolved under the stewardship of three generations of the Feld family. The new exhibit, located on the second floor of the Tibbals Learning Center, will immerse guests in sights and sounds from over fifty years of circus productions. As visitors relive their own memories, they will be introduced to the diverse community of talents responsible for creating the magic of every edition of The Greatest Show On Earth and they will see the evolution of one of the most well-recognized brands in the world.

Irvin Feld was a highly successful concert producer, presenting rising musical talents including Chubby Checker, Nat King Cole, and Frank Sinatra, when he, with brother Israel, bought Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey in 1967. At the time, the circus was struggling to rekindle its hold on the American imagination, having folded its canvas a decade earlier. Feld immediately implemented changes to invigorate the circus, creating a second touring unit, bringing new talents from abroad, and founding a school for clowns to assure new generations of comedic talent. Above all, Irvin Feld assured that the grand sensory spectacle that had characterized the circuses of his youth was reimagined to transcend the limitations of the arena and to exceed the expectations of a new generation of circus-goers. Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey’s larger than life personalities performed their feats of exceptional daring, strength, and grace in arenas transformed by sparkling costumes, themed scenic elements, and perfectly choreographed sound and lighting.

Inspired by Irvin Feld’s dedication to producing entertainment for the whole family, the Felds have continued to innovate the production of the traveling entertainments. Under Kenneth Feld’s leadership, the circus’s success led to the creation of Feld Entertainment, a company whose live entertainments reach audiences around the globe. And, for performers from around the globe, performing with The Greatest Show On Earth became the crowning moment of their career. Feld Entertainment productions, including Disney on Ice and Monster Jam®, take inspiration from the circus, incorporating acrobatic feats of performers as well as advances in light, sound, costuming, and logistics.

The Greatest Show On Earth Gallery will present original artifacts, design drawings, wardrobe pieces and other artifacts in an exhibit that is rich with moving images, sound, and even scents. Among the highlights of the visitor experience are interactive screens for exploring many of the greatest stars of the modern Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey as well as a short, immersive film that creatively weaves together films of performance, sound, and other effects with authentic circus costumes to evoke the excitement and awe that are the heart of audience experience of the circus.

By Jennifer Lemmer Posey
Tibbals Curator of Circus
The Ringling Art Library has recently acquired, through the generous funding of the Frank E. Duckwall Foundation, a unique ten-volume set of seventeenth-century emblem books. These volumes significantly add to the Art Library’s current collection of emblem books, some of which are quite rare.

An emblem book is a genre that was particularly popular in the Protestant Netherlands of this period. Its purpose was to present moral lessons, spiritual meditations, and advice about how to live a godly life. The format of all emblem books was fairly the same and included: a title or motto, a poem or prose elucidating the message to be conveyed, and an emblematic image to illustrate the writing.

In 1714, a customer in Antwerp commissioned a bookbinder to assemble a collection of ten specific books by Jan Luiken (1647-1712), one of the most prolific Dutch author-artists of his time. These volumes, bound uniformly in contemporary ivory vellum, are profusely illustrated with more than 570 etchings by Luiken and his son, Casper. The set includes six first editions. Students can also sign-up for smaller projects throughout the semester. These include activities such as dusting circus objects, making art kits, working Ringling Underground, and even helping install exhibitions to get a well-rounded view of museum operations. On top of their internship and classes, three of the students also have part-time jobs in the Events Department and the Museum Store. Join us in welcoming these FSU students to The Ringling family!

The Ringling is pleased to present an exhibition that celebrates the life and artwork of Eleanor Merritt. Eleanor was a dedicated volunteer at The Ringling for many years as a docent and board member. She also served as president of the Venice Art Center and was active in other arts organizations as well. Eleanor passed away in 2019 leaving a legacy of art and public service. The exhibition is dedicated to her spirit and creativity and represents a small sample of a significant body of work the artist created over her long career. Beginning with an early work from the 1950s, Untitled (Seated Figure), and concluding with her last painting, Blue Embrace of 2018, the exhibition highlights her creative use of materials, movement between figuration and abstraction, and her commitment to women’s rights.

Born in Harlem in 1933, Eleanor’s talent in drawing and painting led to her acceptance to the prestigious High School of Music and Art in New York where she excelled as a student receiving the school’s top art award, the St. Gaudens Medal. She then attended Brooklyn College where she studied with some of the most influential artists of the time including Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, Kurt Seligmann, Burgoyne Diller, and Jimmy Ernst. She absorbed the energy and physicality of her teachers’ work into her own interests in figuration and symbolism. Arriving in Sarasota in the 1980s, Eleanor exhibited widely in Florida. Her final exhibition in 2017 at the Arts & Cultural Alliance celebrated her 60 years of painting. In 2013, she received national recognition with an exhibition at the Houston Museum of African American Culture. We are pleased to announce, along with this exhibition, the acquisition of three works into the permanent collection of The Ringling.

The works in the exhibition come from the artist’s estate and from a few prestigious private collections. The artist’s daughter, Lisa, and artist Mike Solomon were critical guides in the development of this exhibition.
Bene and Joyce White are new Circle level members at The Ringling but they are not new to Sarasota or the world of modern and contemporary art. Joyce and Bene have been together almost 50 years and credit their love and passion for art to their cultural and vibrant roots in Harlem, New York, and Charleston, South Carolina. In 2020, the Whites loaned a magnificent collage and acrylic piece to The Ringling that was exhibited in Sam Gilliam: Selections.

When and how did you first hear about The Ringling?
We’ve been in Sarasota for 22 years, first as snowbirds. We had come to the museum in the late 1990s, but it was a different place. The museum did not feel very welcoming and it did not have artwork that celebrated black culture. We just did not think that the museum was very inclusive at that time.

Why did you join The Ringling’s Circle membership program suddenly this year after all this time?
We met The Ringling Museum of Art Foundation Board of Directors member, Warren Colbert, and he began telling us that The Ringling was now a very diverse museum. He also told us about several programs and initiatives at the museum with a specific focus on inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA). We began discussing an upcoming exhibition at the museum called Sam Gilliam: Selections. We were excited when we were asked to lend our piece for the museum and community to see. We were very impressed with the subsequent exhibition and the beautiful Circle Member Exhibition Preview and Dinner held in the Museum of Art Courtyard.

What do you hope to continue to gain from your Circle membership?
A further exposure to art and people. We love meeting people...especially fellow art lovers! We plan to introduce and invite more people of color to events and exhibitions.

We want to expose them to The Ringling from our perspective. Ultimately, we want to find homes for our beloved collection and we hope that the museum might be one of the places in the future.

As we have discussed, you recently loaned a piece from your private collection for our Sam Gilliam: Selections exhibition at The Ringling. How did you become art collectors?
We thought you’d never ask! When we started collecting art, we had recently retired. We were on a journey exploring and learning about different cultures and appreciating art. We had a great friend in New York named Grace Engleton who was a collector and art dealer. Her business Heart to Art allowed us to meet and get to know artists personally like Richard Mayhew, Benny Andrews, Elizabeth Catlett, James Denmark, Emma Amos, and Ann Tankley to name a few—who are all in our collection. We were able to meet them and in some cases go to their homes and studios all because of Grace! One of our most treasured collections is by the artist Robert (Bob) Blackburn. We proudly own 17 of his works.

What is the main motivation behind your collecting?
We love collecting artwork by all artists but especially artists of color. The process of collecting art is an art. We personally identify with black art because it tells our story. It tells our history. The artwork in our collection reflects who we are. It tells our stories, our grandparents’ stories, and our ancestors’ stories.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
Bene and Joyce White

PHOTO, AT RIGHT:
The renowned American sculptor, Beverly Pepper, was always a fan of the triangle’s simple shape. She admired its formal and conceptual qualities; hence, the triangle is a reoccurring motif throughout her oeuvre, even on a monumental scale. Pepper embedded the triangle into her infamous earthworks across the United States, such as Sand Dunes (1985), a series of mirrored sand sculptures wedged into the shoreline on Florida’s Smyrna Beach, and the electrifying red Major Ritual II (1975 – 1976) situated on the grassy courtyard of Toledo’s City Hall. Whether rendered in a reflective patina or vibrantly painted steel, the triangular forms appear to energetically burst out from beneath the ground yet quickly find solace among their surroundings, as if they were returning to somewhere familiar. Upon longer visitation, the triangle’s seductive surfaces that radiate with primary colors and become luminous in sunlight, coarse and gritty in Corten, or sleek in their whiteness, surrender the sharpness of their towering pointed edges and invite us into a whole new landscape previously unimagined.

Yet stone remained Pepper’s cherished material, and the artist continued to pursue explorations of the triangle on a more intimate scale in granite, onyx, and marble. She explained, “When working with stone there is a very different dynamic than one experiences with cast or fabricated metal. Stones have a spirit. Every stone asks for its own solution. Michelangelo said that each stone has a life inside waiting to be released. This is also how I experience it.” Pepper’s Homage to the Triangle I (1999) illustrates this idea of a life force by embracing the allegorical meaning of the triangular form, an ancient symbol of fertility and a timeless sign for the feminine. In this altar-like work, the artist’s hand is visible in the unusual roughness of the milky Carrara marble. The bold and impenetrable surface has been punctured to reveal a geometric cavity that seems at once to release unwieldy energy and to ingest it.

Pepper was a master at combining abstraction with archaic forms and creating a continuum of meanings, as seen in Homage to the Triangle I. The incised triangular void, a central feature of this work, spills into a crevasse that travels upwards from inside the hollowed out primitive form into a narrow irregular passage extending beyond the limits of the sculpture. By carving out this mystical shape, the artist inserts an element that was not there before, and imbues the work with a charged spirituality linked to nothingness. This fundamental absence rejects the representational realm, overflowing beyond the work’s edge and continues to travel into the infinite space, transcending light and opening itself up to our interpretation of what lies beyond the visible.

The Ringling has several works by Pepper in the collection; however, this exquisite work in marble marks the first example in stone by this important artist. Homage of Triangle I is presented in the exhibition As long as there is sun, as long as there is light. Selections from the Bring Gift and The Ringling Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art, on view through August 13, 2023.

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