Thank you!

We greatly value all our members! Your steadfast support for The Ringling is amazing and heartening to all of us who work to present educational programs, fascinating exhibitions, and unique performances for our members and visitors. As we enter May and the summer months, we leave behind an immensely successful winter season. During the months of January through April we welcomed over 150,000 visitors and exceeded 2019’s admission income by over 5%. We opened new exhibitions and began providing more programs in person and moved toward a new normal following the past two years of challenges.

Following his critical success with the exhibition Metadata, Christopher Jones, the Stanton B. and Nancy W. Kaplan Curator of Photography and Media Art at The Ringling, once again curates an immensely important show for The Ringling. The exhibition, Highlights from the Stanton B. and Nancy W. Kaplan Collection of Photography celebrates the first showing of works from the significant gift of over 1,000 photographic images that represent some of the most important photo-based artists of the 19th and 20th centuries. Highlights include works by Berenice Abbott, Ruth Bernhard, Eugenie Atget, and many others. The Kaplans’ generous gift also included endowments for the Curator of Photography and New Media position and for the Photography program. These endowments ensure that Photography and New Media will continue to be an important component of The Ringling’s work in exhibitions, publications, and acquisitions into the future. We are indebted to the Kaplans for their foresight and generosity.

Also featured in this magazine is the exhibition The world is just so small, now. Developed for the Keith D. and Linda L. Monda Gallery by Olia Wlusek, The Ringling’s Monda Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, this exhibition highlights work on paper, including many recent additions to the collection. This is the first time many of these works have been displayed in the galleries and we are thrilled to showcase the wide range and diversity of the collection for our community.

We all were saddened to learn of the passing of Howard Tibbals in March of this year. Howard spent roughly 20 hours a week over six decades creating this model of the tented circus in America in the 1930s and there is simply no better way to understand this era than to visit the Howard Bros. Circus. As always, we look forward to seeing you at The Ringling!
Highlights from the Stanton B. and Nancy W. Kaplan Collection of Photography

By Christopher Jones
Stanton B. and Nancy W. Kaplan Curator of Photography and Media Arts

This summer The Ringling is excited to feature a selection of works from the museum’s Stanton B. and Nancy W. Kaplan Collection of Photography. This collection, generously donated to The Ringling in 2019, includes over 1000 photographic objects and images, representing some of the most important photo-based artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Kaplan Collection includes works by such notables as Berenice Abbott, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Eugène Atget, Ruth Bernhard, Margaret Bourke-White, Brassai, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Lewis W. Hine, André Kertész, Robert Mapplethorpe, Edward Weston, and James Van Der Zee, to name but a few. These artists endure as some of the most influential figures in the history of photography.

The influence of Eugène Atget on twentieth-century photography is hard to overstate. Atget spent the first part of his life pursuing an unsuccessful career as an actor in France but later turned to photography to support himself. He set out photographing the streets of Paris, as well as other environs, seeking out the architectural details and other urban minutiae that highlighted modernization in juxtaposition with France’s medieval and ancient past. He referred to his images as ‘documents’ for artists, and envisioned them as studies for painters and designers, but it was local museums and libraries that typically supported his endeavors. The photographer Berenice Abbott, an assistant to Man Ray, the early Dadaist and Surrealist artist based in Paris at the time, was an early champion of Atget’s work and acquired much of his archive upon his death. The Surrealists soon embraced his uncanny and idiosyncratic vision, and Atget influenced generations of street photographers, including Manuel Álvarez Bravo and Henri Cartier-Bresson. Abbott herself was inspired by Atget’s documentary approach in her own project Changing New York.
which she began in 1929 to capture the transformation of the city’s urban landscape.

One of a few women photographers of her time, Ruth Bernhard, is most recognized for her work with the female nude. In her own words, she sought to “elevate the female nude above and beyond the traditional male point of view.” By the careful orchestration of light, shadow, and pose, Bernhard produces a graceful relationship between shapes and overall form. While sensual, Bernhard’s images are more psychologically evocative than sexually charged. Her interest in formalist approaches to photography began when she studied under Edward Weston in the 1930s and developed in the 1940s when she joined the f/64 group of photographers that included Ansel Adams and Imogen Cunningham.

The Kaplan Collection also includes a group of rare photographic albums from Japan, containing some of the earliest examples of photography in the country. These remarkable scenes intended for tourists and travelers, provide a deeper look into the culture and landscape of Meiji Era Japan (1868-1912), and help us better understand the emergence of a photographic tradition in the country. This exhibition will focus on many of the highlights of the Kaplan Photography Collection and explore the ways in which photographers used their medium to create new ways of seeing and expressing the social and phenomenal experiences of modernity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
“If you don’t dream, you don’t get there,” was Howard Tibbals’ reasoning in 2008 as he committed $4 million to the building of the second phase of the Tibbals Learning Center. This gift, coupled with Howard and Janice Tibbals’ donation of $6.5 million to fund the initial building and endow the circus program, transformed The Ringling into the leading public institution dedicated to the history of the circus.

Howard Tibbals’ fascination with the circus began in childhood. While spending summers with his grandparents in West Virginia, he watched the unloading of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus train and then viewed the setup of the circus lot through binoculars from the hilltop near his grandparents’ home. He recalled watching the entire experience of circus day from that distance, seeing “…the great circus display unfold and pack so meticulously back into the wagons, re-load on the railroad trains, and move on to the next town…but that night the show never ended for me.”

In 1956, as a freshman in college, Howard began work on what is today known as The Howard Bros. Circus Model. For more than sixty years, Howard devoted at least twenty hours a week to model making. Beginning with the World’s Fair in Knoxville, Tennessee, the miniature was displayed at several venues and museums around the country before finding its final home at The Ringling. Howard continued to create model pieces, with the last wagon added in April of 2021.

To assure the historical accuracy of his model circus, Howard Tibbals began collecting materials documenting circus history. Today, the Tibbals Circus Collection includes photographs, posters and other advertising materials, programs, scrapbooks, correspondence, design drawings, costumes, and props as well as more than two thousand books related to the circus. This unparalleled collection, now held at The Ringling, documents all aspects of the circus and other travelling entertainments. Howard’s driving vision was to establish The Ringling as the foremost center for the preservation and research of circus history. He and his wife Janice led that effort through donations of collections, funds, and their own time. Howard’s passion has been instilled in the many staff and volunteers who worked with him over the years. As we mourn his passing, we remember that the Howard Bros. Circus Model and the posters, photographs, and additional materials in the extraordinary Tibbals Circus Collection are Howard’s legacy and will continue to delight visitors and inspire new generations to learn about the circus in America.
This spring and summer, twenty-eight prints, watercolors, and drawings by nineteen artists from The Ringling's collection of modern and contemporary art will be on view in the Keith D. and Linda L. Monda Gallery for Contemporary Art. A majority of the works will be on display for the first time since their recent acquisition through purchase and donation, along with several rarely seen lithographs, woodblock prints, and a relief print on glass acquired by the museum between the early 1960s and late 1990s.

The Ringling has a long-standing subscription to Graphicstudio, an experimental and educational printmaking facility founded in 1968 at the University of South Florida in Tampa, which offers residencies for established and emerging artists. This relationship assures an ongoing addition to the museum’s holdings of individual works on paper, as well as portfolios, artist books, and multiples, by some of today’s most exciting artists working in the medium of paper. Highlights on view include a laser-cut felt and pigment print titled Embodied from 2018 by William Villalongo, a Brooklyn, New York-based artist whose cut-outs from black velour paper depict abstracted Black bodies referencing the cycle of violence against—and the erasure of—people of color. Another important work from Graphicstudio is a book titled A Brazilian in Florida (Um Brasileiro á Florida) from 1998 by artist Abrulio Batista. The work chronicles the Brazilian artist’s journey to Tampa in eight woodblock prints and an eight-part poem in English and Portuguese. The exhibition’s title The world is just so small, now is borrowed from the poem’s first stanza.

Another strategy in acquiring works of art by contemporary artists is by selecting works from exhibitions held at the museum. In this way, the museum is supporting fresh talent and living artists, which contributes to building a relevant and timely collection. For example, earlier this year, The Ringling purchased Peach Blossom Island (Stilts) from 2019 by a Vancouver-based artist Howie Tsui, who was born in Hong Kong and raised in Nigeria and Canada. Tsui’s artwork titled Retainers of Anarchy (2017), an amalgamation of martial arts characters presented in the form of a 25-meter hand-drawn animation with sound, was previously on view in the Monda Gallery for Contemporary Art in 2020. This newly acquired drawing is based on wuxia characters from Taohua Island, one of the islands of the Zhoushan Archipelago, referenced in Jin Yong’s Condor Trilogy. The popular novels written between 1957 and 1961 are a main source of inspiration for Tsui, whose fantastical work explores social and political issues within the historical and present-day Hong Kong, as well as Asian diaspora. Egungun (2015) is a recently acquired print by another widely recognized multimedia artist, Cauleen Smith, whose film was previously included in a group exhibition For Real This Time (2020 – 2021) at the museum. The subject of her print is based on Egungun, the costumed dancers who appear at public celebrations for the dead in Yoruba societies, and through which the artist honors her own ancestors and the ancient Indigenous history of Florida.

Donated works comprise a significant part of the modern and contemporary art collection and the growth and breadth of this collection relies on the generosity of committed donors to the
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museum. For example, long-term donors Warren and Margot Coville gifted numerous works in 2020, including Carnivale Drummer (1986), a vibrant watercolor by the important African American artist Romare Bearden, whose work celebrates Black and Caribbean cultures. Visionary art collectors include Mr. Raymond Learsy, who gifted several works by feminist artist and activist Linda Stein, whose work in foil, graphite, and acrylic explores gender and identity. Stein’s drawings also help to fill an important gap in the museum’s holdings by women-identifying artists, as well as bring compelling narratives about self-portraiture and queer discourse to the fore. Additionally, thanks to the support of the Michael and Sherle Berger Foundation and Michael Berger Gallery, the museum now owns a large-scale lithograph by the widely recognized Chinese-born American artist Hung Liu, who sadly passed away last year. Liu left an outstanding legacy of visual work, which brings attention to the marginalization of child street acrobats, women laborers, sex workers, and war refugees during the communist regime in China.

The works in this exhibition grant us an intimate look into the artists’ lived experiences and offer an insight into their unique observations on the state of the global community. The works grapple with often shared social-political, health, and environmental issues that impact us all, including racial and social injustice, immigration, and climate crisis, among many. The assembled works also serve as investigations into the broader themes of identity, sexuality, and gender roles, explored through the immediacy of ink, graphite, and paper. Many artists adopt the traditional printmaking techniques, such as woodcut, etching, engraving, and lithography, while others embrace screen printing, collage, and photo-based processes, such as cyanotype. Even though most of these works are on paper, some artists have chosen wood and glass for their working surface. The exhibition illustrates a wide variety of printmaking techniques and innovative approaches to the medium of paper, as well as the diversity of cross-cultural perspectives on what it means to be living in the world today.
Celebrating 50 years in Florida.

Northern Trust is proud to support The Ringling Museum. For 50 years we’ve been meeting our Florida clients’ financial needs while nurturing a culture of caring and a commitment to invest in the communities we serve. It’s all a part of being a good neighbor.

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50

CULTIVATING ECO-PERFORMANCE

By Elizabeth Doud
Currie-Kohlmann Curator of Performance

The creative territory of performing arts continues to shift in the pandemic’s subduction zones, which includes the difficult to predict future of live performance. However, unexpected changes bring opportunities for new growth, and The Ringling’s Art of Performance program is adapting in ways that complement a time that has proven uncertain yet fertile for artists.

The budding Artist in Residence initiative that has developed over the last two years yielded valuable creative research time and space for performance makers. This is resulting in new works which will eventually make their way to the Historic Asolo Theater and other museum venues. Besides upcoming residencies with playwrights Tara Moses and Annalisa Dias of Groundwater Arts (May 2022) and the Pioneer Winter Collective (July and September 2022), we are providing commissioning support to three performing artists working at the intersection of ecology, climate change, and environmental justice.

Each of these creatives has an area of inquiry related to human-non human relationships, the impacts of climate change and eco-scenic explorations that break open the boundaries of the conventional theater spaces: Choreographer John Heginbotham (NYC) and his work about mushrooms and John Cage’s legacy as a music visionary and self-taught mycologist will develop You Look Like a Fun Guy; Moira Finucane (Melbourne, Australia) further explores women, gender, and climate justice in a new performance installation called HYDRA; and performance collective Mondo Bizzaro (New Orleans, LA) will further iterate the Invisible Rivers project, which employs the artistic practices of music, theater and boat-building to respond to the gulf coast region’s interconnected struggles against coastal land loss, environmental racism and displacement. As part of these commissioning periods, artists will work in on-site residencies and offer museum members, local artists and community partners opportunities to learn about their works-in-progress in conversations, workshops or masterclasses. In the 2022–2023 season, join us for artist-led conversations about process, form, and the subject matter each has chosen.

Being able to support artists directly with commissioning funds for the creation of new work demonstrates the museum’s firm commitment to the future of performance in Sarasota and the wider performing arts eco-system nationally and internationally.
While visiting friends in Sarasota, Donna Gora found the growth of the arts and culture scene was exciting and had a lot of opportunity. So, in June 2019, Donna moved to Sarasota. She had been in south Sarasota when she first arrived, where several friends mentioned The Ringling as one of the more historical arts and culture organizations in the area. She was intrigued, especially since she had the impression it was a circus museum, having been to the circus several times as a child.

Donna eventually moved to the northern part of the city and ventured onto our property to become a member after her sister-in-law who was in town visiting, marveled at her visit, remarking that spending 6 hours there wasn’t enough since there was so much to see! Now that it is right here in her backyard, she found it as a solace during the pandemic. “I can take a break from my home office and walk around the gorgeous property and take a relaxing pause along the shoreline underneath the canopy of shade trees, or step inside an exhibition and be transported.” Donna works as a Financial Advisor for Merrill Lynch. Working remotely during the pandemic allowed Donna to come over during lunch or visit as part of the Member Mornings on Thursdays, which has given her a sense of community belonging. To further her involvement in the community, Donna serves on the board of a local, education based non-profit and also volunteers with several women’s leadership organizations.

Becoming a Member was a “no brainer” for Donna. Membership is affordable and although single, she bought a dual membership, so she can bring houseguests, friends, and clients, and can make a visit a regular stop for a coffee, lunch, or dinner. “The Ringling has so much to offer, and the great thing is many of my guests have become members.” The other perk Donna enjoys is the reciprocal benefits with other arts and cultural organizations around the state and the country.

Some of Donna’s favorite exhibits are the Ting Tsung and Wei Fong Chao Center for Asian Art and the Howard Bros. Circus Model. “The circus model amazes me, there are so many details that one can find on each visit. But, overall, it is the beautiful grounds, the Museum Courtyard, the Bolger Promenade and Campiello, and the mix of nature, arts, and education that makes The Ringling unique.”

Dr. Evans comes to us from the Oriental Institute (OI) at the University of Chicago where she served as the Deputy Director and Chief Curator. She is the author of The Lives of Sumerian Sculpture: An Archaeology of the Early Dynastic Temple (2012), and her co-edited volumes include the Met exhibition catalogue Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C. (2008) and Mesopotamian Temple Inventories in the Third and Second Millennia BCE: Integrating Archaeological, Textual, and Visual Sources (2019). Jean received her PhD in Art History and Archaeology from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, and she was a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art from 1999-2008. At The Ringling, Evans oversees the museum’s day to day operations and is a key member of The Ringling’s leadership team working closely with the Executive Director on strategy and planning.

JASON ROBERTS
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF EVENTS AND RENTALS
Prior to coming to The Ringling, Jason spent nearly seven years at IMG Academy, where he managed all manner of sporting events and oversaw extended training stays by some of the most recognizable organizations in the industry. Jason graduated from Florida State University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in American History and Black Studies in 1996. He is now attending an online graduate program in Sports Administration at Gonzaga University. His work at The Ringling currently centers on properly supporting privately hosted events and working cross-collaboratively to guarantee successful execution of in-house programming.

KATIE NICKEL
HEAD OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS
Prior to this appointment, Katie served as The Ringling’s School and Teacher Program Coordinator. Katie has worked in art museums throughout Florida and the United Kingdom and has a background in early childhood education. Katie earned a Master of Arts degree from the University of Florida in Museology, specializing in art museum education. She is currently a doctoral student at the University of South Florida in the Educational Innovation and Program Development department. Katie’s work is centered on creating inclusive and playful experiences where all people can learn, explore, and engage around works of art.

Dr. Boda oversees the Archives, Collections, Education, and Library departments. As a Florida State University (FSU) faculty member, he also supervises and teaches in-residence graduate interns enrolled in the Museums and Cultural Heritage Studies (MCHS) and Museum Education and Visitor-centered Curation (EC) programs. Jay has presented his research internationally—focused on performance-based pedagogies, transmedia storytelling, and critical thinking in museums. He received his PhD in Museum Education and Visitor-centered Curation from FSU in 2020. Jay established the Director of Education and Interpretation position at the Imagine Museum in St. Petersburg. Before working in museums, Jay honorably retired from the U.S. Air Force as a Master Sergeant.

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MILES WHITE
BIRD OF PARADISE COSTUME

By Jennifer Lemmer Posey
Tibbals Curator of Circus

As one of the most significant elements in the visual spectacle of the circus, the very best examples of costumes combine form and function with highly detailed finishes. The Bird of Paradise Costume, designed and made for the 1951 Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, is decorated with thousands of sequins, glass beads, rhinestones, and feathers even though only a small number of people ever saw it up close. The lavish use of trims meant that the costume reflected light from all angles, accentuating the movements of the single trapeze performer high above center ring.

Like many objects in the circus collections, the leotard is both a beautiful object created by master craftspeople and a symbol of significant stories in circus history. The costume was designed by Miles White for the 1951 season of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey and his original drawing is part of the Tibbals Circus Collection at the museum. The collection also includes images of Pinito del Oro performing her single trapeze act in the Miles White costume. The 1951 season was del Oro’s second year with the Ringling show, and she was given featured spot over center ring as the star of the aerial ballet “Lovely Luwana Lady.” She performed amazing feats of balance on a swinging trapeze bar, surrounded by dozens of showgirls posing atop web ropes in a beautiful aerial ballet.

Although created from the same Miles White design, the leotard in the museum collection was not the one worn by Pinto del Oro in 1951. That year, the Ringling circus also was the backdrop for the filming of the Cecil B. DeMille film, The Greatest Show on Earth. In order to blend footage from the circus into the film, DeMille’s stars wore many of the White designs. The leotard was made for actress Betty Hutton who portrayed the circus’ star aerial performer, Holly. The film was released in 1952 and won the Oscar for Best Picture.

The costume was donated, along with thirty-six other pieces by the estate of circus fan and model builder Dominic Yodice. Mr. Yodice acquired the finest collection of costumes related to the DeMille movie and recognizing the film’s ties to the circus in Sarasota and the Miles White collection, wished the collection to reside permanently at The Ringling.

At the museum, this beautiful costume is evidence of the creative genius of Miles White and the glittering spectacle of mid-century circus costumes, and its history also exemplifies the magical hold that the world of circus has had for multiple generations.
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