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NCMA Launches Matrons of the Arts Initiative to Highlight Female Artists

Ongoing campaign highlights female artists from around the world, throughout history

Raleigh, N.C. – The North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) announces a new initiative, [Matrons of the Arts](#), which highlights female-identified artists in both the Museum’s permanent collection and around the world. Matrons of the Arts is a Museum-wide, ongoing project that presents programs, exhibitions, and acquisitions by and about women artists. Inspired in part by the [name five women artists](#) challenge put on by the National Museum of Women in the Arts—and playing off the phrase *patron of the arts*—this campaign seeks to bring the public’s attention to women who have been and continue to be major figures in the world of art.



“Women artists historically have been underrepresented in most museums,” said Museum Director Lawrence J. Wheeler. “As the Museum continues to collect some of the best artists of our time—Mickalene Thomas, Louise Bourgeois, Helen Frankenthaler, Susan Rothenberg, Elizabeth Murray, Alison Saar, and many others—we hope to challenge and change this oversight, beginning at our own institution.”

Matrons of the Arts will add new acquisitions to the Museum’s free permanent collection, host programs and events, and spotlight female artists through special exhibitions. The first purchase of the initiative is a bust of Daphne, created in 1853 by artist Harriet Hosmer, known as the first professional female sculptor in America and working at a time when women were often banned from even attending art classes. The bust’s new home is in the American Gallery. The NCMA is already home to several works by prominent female artists, including Georgia O’Keeffe’s [Cebolla Church](#), 1945; [Portrait of Madame X Dressed for the Matinee](#), 1878, by the renowned American impressionist Mary Cassatt; Elisabeth Vigée Lebrun’s [portrait of Count Shuvalov](#), 1795–97; Louise Nevelson’s [Black Zag CC](#), 1977; and important [African ceramics](#) created by women.

Special programming and events will accompany the initiative, including a free January 28 [Women in Art lecture](#) with Bridget Quinn, author of *Broad Strokes: 15 Women Who Made Art and Made History (In That Order)*. She’ll use the late Linda Nochlin’s revolutionary 1971 essay, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists,” as a starting point of discussion. The lecture is sold out, but [overflow seating](#) is available.

Traveling and temporary exhibitions will continue to highlight female artists, as seen in current Museum exhibitions like photographer Barbara Morgan’s [Rhythmic Vitality](#) and multimedia artist

(continued)

Sabine Gruffat's [A Kiss of the Earth](#) video installation, along with weaver and textile artist Andrea Donnelly's [We've Met Before](#), closing January 28, 2018. The spring exhibition [You Are Here: Light, Color, and Sound Experiences](#) features several female artists, including Soo Sunny Park, Janet Cardiff, Anila Agha, and Durham artist Heather Gordon. The Museum will also host [Candida Höfer's architectural photography series from Mexico](#) and an exhibition exploring Georgia O'Keeffe and contemporary art in October 2018.

"We're aiming to change the connotation of the word in the art world, elevating 'matron' to champion and leader. A matron is no longer a passive bystander but a fierce and powerful force," said Associate Curator of Contemporary Art Jennifer Dasal. "By working together to make women a priority—and to get both women and men excited to do so—we can really bring about wonderful institutional change."

By telling the stories of female artists whose work is in the NCMA's permanent collection, exhibiting and acquiring more work by important women artists, hosting special events featuring female artists and authors, and selling merchandise that promotes women's significant contribution to the arts, the NCMA joins the international drive to achieve a more diverse representation of female artists in museums around the world.

"Thanks to the initial funding generously provided by the Calvin and Marisa Allen Foundation, Anne Allen Cheatham, and Lizzie Cheatham McNairy and Charlie McNairy," said Chief Curator Linda Dougherty, "the NCMA has been able to start this program with a significant acquisition, several lectures, and two exhibitions featuring women artists. And we have several more projects already in the works."



Created with input from NCMA curators; program directors; and Lizzie McNairy, a member of the Board of Trustees and Collections Committee, the campaign will be a continuous effort to spotlight female-identified artists.

"Throughout time, women have played an invaluable role in the arts as creators and as matrons," said McNairy. "This is a museum that is committed to sharing the creative contributions of women in the arts, for the story of art is far richer when it is inclusive and diverse."

For more information visit ncartmuseum.org/matrons. Follow the movement at the NCMA and around the world on social media via #matronsofthearts.

To get involved or support this effort, contact Marjorie Hodges, director of external relations and special projects, at rhodges@ncartmuseum.org or (919) 664-6860.

Image captions (top to bottom):

Harriet Hosmer, *Daphne*, 1853, marble, Purchased with funds provided by the Calvin and Marisa Allen Foundation, Anne Allen Cheatham, and Lizzie Cheatham McNairy and Charlie McNairy on behalf of the Matrons of the Arts Initiative, and by the bequest of Carlisle Adams

Soo Sunny Park, *Unwoven Light*, 2013, brazed chain link fence, Plexiglas, natural and artificial light, dimensions variable; © 2017 installation view from Wright State University

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About the North Carolina Museum of Art

The North Carolina Museum of Art's permanent collection spans more than 5,000 years, from ancient Egypt to the present, making the institution one of the premier art museums in the South. The Museum's collection provides educational, aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural experiences for the citizens of North Carolina and beyond. The 164-acre Museum Park showcases the connection between art and nature through site-specific works of environmental art. The Museum offers changing national touring exhibitions, classes, lectures, family activities, films, and concerts.

The Museum opened West Building, home to the permanent collection, in 2010. The North Carolina Museum of Art, Lawrence J. Wheeler, director, is located at 2110 Blue Ridge Road in Raleigh. It is the art museum of the State of North Carolina, Roy Cooper, governor, and an agency of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Susi Hamilton, secretary.