

## INSPIRING GENERATIONS THROUGH KNOWLEDGE AND DISCOVERY

### *Highlights from the Collections*

The Smithsonian's collections reflect the depth and diversity found in the Institution's mission, vision, and values. These collections also support the Smithsonian's ability to meet the four grand challenges of its strategic plan: understanding and sustaining a biodiverse planet, unlocking the mysteries of the universe, valuing world cultures, and understanding the American experience. The following stories offer but a glimpse into the Smithsonian's vast network of world-class collections.

### UNDERSTANDING AND SUSTAINING A BIODIVERSE PLANET

#### Four chameleon forest dragons hatch at the National Zoological Park

The Reptile Discovery Center at the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park welcomed four chameleon forest dragons (*Gonyocephalus chamaeleontinus*), also known as chameleon anglehead lizards, into its collection on November 11, 2009. They are the first of their kind to hatch at the Zoo. The parents arrived at the National Zoo in June 2009 and, while in quarantine, the female laid the four eggs. Because so little is known about this species, keepers closely monitored the hatchlings' food intake and behavior in an off-exhibit enclosure.



Their name is deceptive, however: chameleon forest dragons are neither chameleons nor dragons; rather, this species is a type of lizard called an agamid (pronounced "AG-uh-mid"). Some scientists speculate that, like a true chameleon, the forest dragon's subtle color shifts help it blend into its surroundings, send social signals, and even reflect mood changes. Its short, triangular head resembles that of a mythical dragon, and spiky, leaf-shaped ridge plates adorn the crown of its head and extend the length of its back. Fully grown, this lizard can reach up to 12 inches in length, from nose to tip of the tail.

A chameleon forest dragon's scaly skin is a brilliant lime green when it hatches. As it matures, it will either stay green or change to a brown-tan tone with dark brown markings. The camouflage-like colors mimic tree leaves and bark and help the reptile hide from predators.

## From the Bay of Bengal: a dinoflagellate makes its way to the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center

It's a rare event when Smithsonian phytoplankton taxonomist Sharyn Hedrick sees something new. Hedrick, who works at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center on the Chesapeake Bay, has observed, photographed, and identified hundreds of species of dinoflagellates, diatoms, algae, and the like from around the world. Phytoplankton are the microscopic organisms that float in the ocean's photic zone where they can photosynthesize and become a source of food for other creatures in the food web.



The dinoflagellate *Amphisolenia quadrispina* from the Bay of Bengal. It's unique long, thin shape resembles a stick more than it does other dinoflagellates.

It's not an exaggeration to say Hedrick was ecstatic when she peered into her microscope and found *Amphisolenia quadrispina*. "For 20 years I've been hoping to see something like this," she says. *A. quadrispina* has a unique long, thin shape. It resembles a stick more than it does other dinoflagellates. It's huge too—between 600 to 700 microns, which is still smaller than the tip of a needle, but large by phytoplankton standards.

"This is a most unusual species of dinoflagellate," Hedrick says. "Its body is very elongated. The base of the cell has four spinules. They look like little feet or stalks. The neck expands to two collars with the end of the cell protruding through the collars. This is a tropical and subtropical species in both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, the Mediterranean, and the Indian Ocean." The dinoflagellate came in a shipment of samples collected off India's South Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal. Hedrick is adding a photo of *A. quadrispina* to her online Phytoplankton Guide, a source for students and fellow researchers working with phytoplankton.

## UNLOCKING THE MYSTERIES OF THE UNIVERSE

### The National Air and Space Museum and the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory give the public a rare peek into space

As a focal point for the International Year of Astronomy, the National Air and Space Museum (NASM) has opened a new Public Observatory that allows visitors to observe the sun, the moon, and the brighter stars and planets, such as Venus, Jupiter, and Saturn, even during daylight hours. The centerpiece of the Public Observatory Project is a 16-inch Boller & Chivens telescope. The telescope was originally part of Harvard-Smithsonian's Oak Ridge Observatory in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was used for



astronomical research until recently, and is now on loan to the National Air and Space Museum for the Public Observatory Project.

The Public Observatory's position on the National Mall, outside of the NASM facility, reflects one of the main goals of the project: to encourage broad interest in space studies by engaging as many people as possible. By placing the telescope on the Mall, NASM staff anticipate that the telescope will be used by both NASM visitors, who likely have a predisposed interest in space, and newcomers who will enjoy this unique opportunity to learn more about the wonders of the universe.

Guided by NASM's staff of astronomy educators, visitors can discover craters on the moon, spots on the sun (using safe solar filters), the phases of Venus, and other wonders of the universe.



### Meteorite identified by National Museum of Natural History scientists



Linda Welzenbach, manager of the Natural History Museum's meteorite collection, weighs the meteorite.

A meteorite that crashed through the roof of a Lorton, Virginia, doctors' office in January 2010 was recently identified by scientists in the Division of Mineral Sciences at the Museum of Natural History. Local newspapers reported that thousands of people from southern New Jersey to southwestern Virginia witnessed the meteorite streak through the sky in a colorful fireball and break apart as it passed through the atmosphere.

A local television news crew brought the meteorite to the Smithsonian for verification and Meteorite Collections Manager Linda Welzenbach identified it as a stony chondrite meteorite weighing about two-thirds of a pound. "It's ordinary because 85 to 90 percent of everything that falls is this type of meteorite," said Welzenbach. "It has a light gray interior with little, tiny iron, nickel metal particles."

The meteorite is covered with a black fusion crust that was created as its exterior melted

from the heat generated by friction with the Earth's atmosphere. The Museum is hopeful that the meteorite will become part of its Meteorite Collection.



## VALUING WORLD CULTURES

### Freer Gallery of Art acquires tea jar with remarkable provenance

A humble jar widely revered as an icon of Japanese tea culture has been acquired by the Freer Gallery of Art. The jar, made in China during the late Southern Song or Yuan dynasty (13th or 14th century) and shipped to Japan as a container for a commercial product, developed a distinguished pedigree in the hands of influential tea connoisseurs, collectors, and rulers who used it for storing precious tea and displayed it in their tearooms between the 15th and 20th centuries.

“This handsome jar has been admired and sought after by Japanese Tea masters for half a millennium,” said James Ulak, deputy director of the Freer and Sackler galleries. “As the documentation shows, its surface has been admired and caressed by a who’s who of Japan’s cultural giants from the 15th century forward. It is extremely rare to find such a storied work on the market.”



Standing 41.8 centimeters tall with a mottled amber glaze, four lugs, a cylindrical neck, and a rolled lip, the jar carries the name “Chigusa,” which translates to—depending on which Japanese characters are used—“abundance of varieties” or “abundance of plants.” The poetic name is an indication of the jar’s high status in 16th-century Japanese tea culture, in which valued Chinese objects were often imbued with elaborate significance through practices such as naming and adorning them with special accoutrements. The name has been useful to scholars in tracking the jar through the diaries and records of tea connoisseurs and collectors who observed it in use at various tea functions. One

eyewitness, who saw the jar named Chigusa at a gathering in 1586, admired its large size and the reddish color of the clay and noted that it was a “meibutsu,” meaning “celebrated tea object.”

A great deal of the jar’s value derives from the remarkable accrument of documentation and artifacts that accompany it, including inscriptions, letters, ceremonial accessories, and storage boxes that narrate a fascinating history of ownership and association with power over the centuries. Only a few hundred such jars with comparable documentation survive in Japan, and very few exist elsewhere.

“Stripped of its documentation, it would be a very modest jar, but the total package makes it an amazing aesthetic statement,” said Louise Cort, curator of ceramics. “This jar profoundly enhances the Freer’s collection of objects related to ‘chanoyu’ (the tea ceremony). It constitutes a pivotal point around which many threads of narrative might be constructed, enabling scholars to explore how an object’s meaning can change as it crosses cultural boundaries.”

The jar bears four ciphers written in lacquer on its base. The oldest is attributed to Naomi (1397–1471), a painter and professional connoisseur for the Ashikaga shogun. This suggests the possibility, otherwise unrecorded, that the jar circulated among owners close to the Ashikaga government. The next oldest cipher is that of Torii Insetsu (1448–1517), an important tea connoisseur and collector in the international trading city of Sakai, known for innovative tea activity. The next owner to inscribe his cipher was another Sakai tea enthusiast, Ju Soho, who hosted a tea in the new year of 1573 for guests, including the esteemed tea master Sen no Rikyu (1522–1591). Another guest in attendance, Imai Sokyū (1520–1593), described seeing the “large jar...Chigusa” for the first time and noted that it had been Insetsu’s jar. Several years later Sokyū recorded that he had seen the jar again, displayed by a new owner, merchant and city official Kondaya Tokurin, who by then had added his cipher. The base of the jar contains one additional mark, the character “sho,” meaning auspicious. The association of this mark has not yet been determined.

Other records place the jar at the center of Japanese political power at various points in its history. In addition to its earlier affiliation with the Ashikaga shogunate (1336–1573), the jar was employed in a series of gift exchanges aimed at establishing and maintaining alliances between the Tokugawa shoguns (1603–1867) and their political rivals. In 1706, the daimyo of the Kurume domain presented the jar to the fifth shogun, Tsunayoshi (1646–1709), together with a named sword, both from the possessions of his deceased father, as a pledge of his family’s continued loyalty. Thereafter it belonged to the Tokugawa government until its dissolution in 1868, when the jar entered the new art market in Japan.

From the mid-1800s through the early 20th century, it exemplified the modern tea-related collecting of prominent industrial families. The jar remained in private hands in Japan throughout the 20th century and was exhibited in major Japanese exhibitions related to tea culture in 1990 and 1995, leaving its adopted homeland only to come to the recent auction in New York.

## UNDERSTANDING THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

### National Museum of American History acquires First Lady Michelle Obama's inaugural gown



First Lady Michelle Obama formally presented the gown she wore to the 2009 inaugural balls to the Smithsonian's First Ladies Collection during a ceremony at the National Museum of American History on March 9, 2010. The one-shouldered, white-silk chiffon gown, created by designer Jason Wu, is embellished with organza flowers with Swarovski crystal centers. The gown is displayed in the center of "A First Lady's Debut," a new gallery addition to the Museum's popular exhibition *The First Ladies at the Smithsonian*.

For decades, the First Ladies Collection has been one of the most popular attractions at the Smithsonian Institution. The original first ladies exhibition of 1914 was the first display at the Smithsonian to prominently feature women. The exhibition itself has changed in size, location, style, and story several times over the years.

*The First Ladies at the Smithsonian* is divided into four main sections: the evolution of the First Ladies Collection, the tradition of the inaugural gown, a first lady's contribution to the presidency and American society, and the new gallery devoted to the public debut of America's more recent first ladies. Beginning with Mamie Eisenhower, the new gallery focuses on each first lady's public introduction during the inauguration or beginning of her husband's presidency and includes contemporary accounts of initial impressions about each woman and the role she might play in the White House. Supported by a gift from the Elizabeth Carolyn Lux Foundation, "A First Lady's Debut" features life-size photos of the 11 women who have filled the position over the past 50 years, each one wearing her displayed gown.

Together, the two galleries that make up *The First Ladies at the Smithsonian* showcase 24 dresses and more than 100 other objects from the Smithsonian's unique collection of first ladies' materials. Among the dresses displayed in the exhibition's first gallery are Martha Washington's silk taffeta gown, Grace Coolidge's flapper-style evening dress, and Helen Taft's 1909 inaugural ball gown—the first to be presented to the Smithsonian by a first lady.



"The donation of an inaugural gown is a long-held tradition and the most visible of the objects our historians collect to document and explore the contributions of first ladies to the presidency and American society," said Museum Director Brent Glass.

## National Museum of African American History and Culture acquires Harriet Tubman collection

Tubman, born into slavery on Maryland's Eastern Shore, gained international acclaim as an Underground Railroad operator, Civil War spy, and suffragist. Items from the Tubman collection were unveiled at a March 10, 2010, ceremony on Capitol Hill to coincide with the anniversary of Tubman's death in 1913.

The collection includes such objects as photographs, correspondence, speech manuscripts, souvenir programs, household items, and clothing accessories. Among the items shedding light on Tubman's private life are family photographs, an 1876 hymn book signed by Tubman, and a lace shawl (ca. 1897) given to her by England's Queen Victoria. Photographs of Tubman's 1913 funeral include one showing her lying in state at the A.M.E. Zion Church in Auburn, N.Y., surrounded by members of the Harriet Tubman Home board of directors.



The National Museum of African American History and Culture recently acquired a collection of artifacts documenting the life and work of abolitionist Harriet Tubman. Said donor Charles Blockson, "Harriet Tubman is one of the most important women in the history of America, and her story needs to be heard by generations to come."



The Harriet Tubman collection is a gift to NMAAHC from Charles L. Blockson, writer, historian, and former board member of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. He also is founder and curator of the Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection of rare texts, slave narratives, art, and other historically significant artifacts. The items came to him after the death of a Tubman relative. "I inherited her belongings . . . but they belong in this museum," said Blockson. Blockson's family story is intertwined with Tubman's: his research shows he is the descendant of former slave Jacob Blockson, who escaped with Tubman and settled in Canada.

"There is something both humbling and sacred found in the personal items of such an iconic person," said Lonnie Bunch, director of NMAAHC. "It is an honor to be able to show the private side of a very public person, a woman whose very work for many years put her in service to countless others. This donation by Charles Blockson is a selfless gesture that ensures that her story will be enshrined forever within the Smithsonian Institution."

## Iconic logo reinvisioned in Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum gift



The poster, *I (Heart) New York More Than Ever*, by influential and prolific graphic designer Milton Glaser was acquired by Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum as a gift from the artist in December 2009. In this work Glaser revisits his ubiquitous logo originally created in 1975 to promote tourism in New York State at a time when New York City was economically depressed and bordering on unlivable due to crime. The image compares this bleak period in New York City's history to the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, when fear and sadness decimated the morale of the nation's citizens. The blackened scar on the heart reflects the geography of the World Trade Center Towers in Lower Manhattan and metaphorically illustrates the resilience of New Yorkers as the heart of the United States. Glaser was a recipient of the National Design Awards prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award in 2004, and his work is currently on display at Cooper-Hewitt in the exhibition *Design USA: Contemporary Innovation*.

## Cooper-Hewitt acquires important example of American Aesthetic Movement furniture

New York City-based Herter Brothers was established by German-born brothers Christian and Gustave Herter, highly skilled craftsmen with a decidedly cosmopolitan design sense. Their production of high-quality Renaissance Revival and Aesthetic Movement furniture developed an international reputation, turning the tables on American furniture from a domestic market to that of export as well. This chair, an early example of Japonism in American furniture, is a superb expression of high-quality craftsmanship and design that shows the growing cross-cultural influences on American design and its influence elsewhere. The Museum's research, as well as the firm's number stamped into the chair, established that the chair is both the first example of American Aesthetic Movement furniture in the Smithsonian's collections, as well as a key piece of American and international design history.



The inlaid rosewood chair, ca. 1878–80, is the first example of American Aesthetic Movement furniture in the Smithsonian's collections.



## Remains of William Taylor White (1837–1852) donated to the National Museum of Natural History

The National Museum of Natural History recently acquired the remains, clothing, and coffin of William Taylor White, a 15-year-old boy who was buried in Washington, D.C., in 1852. His coffin was unearthed in Washington’s Columbia Heights neighborhood in April 2005 during a construction project at an apartment building.

“The results of the multidisciplinary and collaborative research that led to the identification of William T. White is a testament in the interaction of the Smithsonian departments and the abilities of the experts involved,” says David Hunt, collections manager of the Physical Anthropology Division at the Natural History Museum.



White, who was a student at Columbian College from Accomack County, Virginia, died of pneumonia and complications from a mitral heart defect. When his coffin was unearthed, his identity was a deep mystery. Only through the diligent work of a multidisciplinary team of Smithsonian staff, interns, and external specialists was White’s identity established. After a number of blind leads the team was able to track down White’s living relatives through historical records. They then used DNA analysis to confirm that the presumed relatives were indeed related to White.

White’s relatives erected a headstone for him at a family cemetery on Virginia’s Eastern Shore and donated his remains, clothing, and coffin to the Natural History Museum’s Department of Anthropology. Future studies of White’s coffin, clothing, and well-preserved remains will further support DNA research by museum staff, as well as research on cast iron coffins and Civil War–era clothing.

## Archives of American Art’s Oral History Collection awarded “Save America’s Treasures” grant

As part of the “Save America’s Treasures” initiative to preserve significant historic properties and collections, the Archives of American Art has been awarded a matching grant of \$250,000 for the preservation and digitization of the Archives’ Oral History Collection, one of the oldest, most-consulted, and historically significant oral history

collections in the country. The Archives is the nation's preeminent repository for primary sources documenting the history of the visual arts.

Interviews of artists and other art world figures conducted for the Archives' Oral History Program are at risk due to deteriorating and increasingly obsolete audio formats. The matching grant from the highly competitive grant program will provide for the preservation of over 4,000 reels, cassettes, and mini-disks, which will be digitally reformatted to preservation quality to ensure their accessibility for future generations.

Begun in 1958, the ever-expanding Oral History Collection now contains nearly 2,000 interviews with artists, collectors, critics, dealers, and others, and is central to a fuller understanding of American art, creativity and culture. Common themes, such as working methods, sources of inspiration, regional affinities, and issues of race, gender, and politics emerge across artistic mediums and generations. Areas of concentration that have yielded fundamental information focus on the New Deal art programs, Latino art, African American art, pop art, feminism, photorealism, public art commissions, new media, and the art market. Recently, the Archives produced 175 interviews with nationally prominent artists who have shaped the field of contemporary craft.

### **National Museum of American History loans 13 cast-iron toys to the White House**



The National Museum of American History has loaned 13 cast-iron toys to the White House for exhibit in the formal Yellow Oval Room, which is located in the second-floor residence.

The toys are from the Museum's outstanding collection of cast-iron and tinplate toys, dating from the 1870s to the 1950s, donated by Sears, Roebuck and Company. Gathered between 1915 and 1960, the collection has more than 1,400 cast-iron and tinplate examples of both American and European origin. Cast-iron toys depict many commonplace but often forgotten aspects of everyday life, such as the circus; horse-drawn vehicles; public transportation, such as buses and trolleys; mail delivery; home equipment, such as stoves and irons; recreation; construction equipment; and farm, fire fighting, and police vehicles.

The cast-iron toys are from a collection of cast-iron and tinplate toys donated to the Museum from Sears, Roebuck and Company.

## The National Museum of American History receives an omnimetre invented in 1891

A circular slide rule called an omnimetre was recently donated to the National Museum of American History by George Dankers, a naval architect who used it for 30 years in the design of ships and boats. Attached to a paper base, the humble disc inscribed with dozens of numbers rests in quiet obscurity in the Museum's Mathematics Collections.



The omnimetre sold successfully in America for some 60 years, yet was never widely popular. Still, this device and other 19th-century aids to arithmetic helped shape and reshape engineering and the activity of mathematicians at a critical time in American history.

The omnimetre is the 1891 invention of Philadelphia engineer Albert Sexton, who created its prototype using a piece of tracing paper and a suspender button. As its name suggests, the omnimetre was designed to carry out numerous operations of arithmetic and trigonometry, says Peggy Kidwell, curator of mathematics at the Smithsonian. "It has scales for multiplication, division, and common logarithms, as well as squares, cubes, and fifth powers of numbers." In his own words, Sexton called his circular invention a "quite useful and inexpensive slide rule."

In the late 1800s, the growth of American professional engineering, new manufacturing techniques, European precedents, and the innovations of people like Sexton combined to encourage much wider use of aids to computation. Arithmetic, once considered a purely intellectual activity, increasingly became a mechanical task. Mathematical analysis also played a larger role in business, engineering, and the social sciences. Ownership of computing devices, especially slide rules, came to be seen as a symbol of technical competence.

The National Museum of American History is home to a collection of several thousand mathematical instruments that includes not only a few hundred slide rules but numerous calculating machines, drawing instruments, geometric models, and teaching devices. Sexton's slide rule is an invention that tells an important story about the rise of mathematics and engineering in America.

## Smithsonian American Art Museum acquires Nam June Paik Archive

The Nam June Paik Archive, which came to the Smithsonian American Art Museum in seven trucks from warehouses on both coasts, is the largest acquisition the Museum has ever received. Collections management staff have completed a four-month preliminary inventory of the archive and recorded brief descriptions of thousands of objects. The cataloging and care of the archive will support efforts to make it available to the public.

The Nam June Paik Archive is the largest-ever acquisition of the American Art Museum.



## Karen LaMonte's *Reclining Dress Impression with Drapery* acquired by Smithsonian American Art Museum



Karen LaMonte's *Reclining Dress Impression with Drapery*, 2009, is considered the strongest piece from the artist's series of life-size, cast-glass dresses.

A 1999 Fulbright scholarship allowed contemporary glass artist Karen LaMonte (b. 1967) to pursue her interest in large-scale glass casting with Zdeněk Lhotský at the renowned Studio Pelechov, north of Prague. During the past decade, LaMonte has used this experience to develop a remarkable series of life-size, cast-glass dresses—works so technically complex that they can only be crafted at Lhotský's studio, one of the world's largest and most advanced centers for glass casting.

*Reclining Dress Impression with Drapery* demonstrates LaMonte's grasp of classical style and

composition. Although the focus on gender in this work is almost playful, it also has roots in the feminist art of the 1960s and 1970s and its critique of fashion. The frilly straps and a firm hip exaggerate the femininity of a woman conspicuously absent. It is easy to imagine that LaMonte has created a response to the industrial forms crafted by this country's other great cast glass artist, Howard Ben Tré.

## New exhibit of the *Philadelphia* at the National Museum of American History

The National Museum of American History's exhibition of the gunboat *Philadelphia*, the oldest surviving American fighting vessel, has been reinterpreted and updated to include its recovery in 1935 and a history of its display at Lake Champlain, as well as its early preservation and acquisition by the Museum. The exhibition includes historical video



The National Museum of American History's exhibition of the *Philadelphia*, the oldest surviving American fighting vessel, now includes the history of its recovery and preservation.

footage of the raising of the *Philadelphia* from Lake Champlain, an interpretive cart that provides hands-on exposure to preservation activities, painted scrimms that provide the visitor with a simulated visual sense of the “underwater” space of the *Philadelphia*, and new displays of artifacts that were recovered with the gunboat, as well as the crew payroll.

Built in 1776, the *Philadelphia* was sunk in Lake Champlain during a naval battle with the British in the same year. The Continental Congress authorized the building of this 54-foot, 29-ton gunboat and eight similar vessels for the defense of the Champlain Valley—the northern frontier of the colonies that was considered the key to the success or failure of the American Revolution. In the summer of 1776, under the leadership of Brigadier General Benedict Arnold, *Philadelphia* and her sister-ships were organized into what historians consider “the first American Navy.”

Throughout the summer and into the fall, the small fleet imposed a strategic delay on British invasion plans to divide the colonies. On October 11, 1776, the Americans met the enemy in a hard-fought battle, but the superior firepower of the British squadron proved decisive. An hour after the initial battle ended, the *Philadelphia* sank, and within three days the British had gained control of Lake Champlain and most of the American fleet had been destroyed. Although a defeat for the Americans, the Lake Champlain naval contest is nevertheless considered the foundation for the defeat of the British army at Saratoga the following year, as it delayed the British campaign and gave the Americans time to build the strength necessary for their victory at Saratoga.

The *Philadelphia* rested on the bottom of Lake Champlain until it was discovered and recovered with much of its equipment intact in 1935 by Lorenzo F. Haggulund, a civil engineer who for many years exhibited it as a tourist attraction. It came to the Museum in 1964, complete with the 24-pound ball that sent the gunboat to the bottom of the lake.



## Archives of American Art accelerates its digitization and Web initiatives through the Terra Foundation for American Art Digitization Project

The Archives continues to provide unprecedented levels of Web access to some of its most significant collections through its Terra Foundation for American Art Digitization Project. During the first quarter of fiscal year 2010, the Archives compiled close to 204,000 digital files and over 114 linear feet of correspondence, photographs, business records, and other papers of illustrator Rockwell Kent; artist and art educator Prentiss Taylor; and lithographer Louis Lozowick. In addition, several collections were digitized in preparation for their release on the Web, including the collections of John White Alexander, Thomas Benedict Clarke, Barry Faulkner, Leon Kroll, and Rose Lamb.



Illustrator  
Rockwell Kent  
(ca. 1930).

## Smithsonian American Art Museum acquires two works by African American artist Hughie Lee-Smith



As Hughie Lee-Smith remarked about his work, “I think my paintings have to do with an invisible life—a reality on a different level.”

The Museum recently acquired two paintings by African American artist Hughie Lee-Smith: *The Beach* and *Confrontation*. Over a 60-year career, Lee-Smith explored psychological corners of the human experience grounded in separation and displacement. His art conveys the alienation and isolation experienced by many African Americans during the middle decades of the 20th century, yet speaks in larger terms about mankind’s inability to reach out and connect with others. In *Confrontation* (oil on canvas, ca. 1970), the girls radiate alienation from each other and from the crumbling infrastructure of their surreal, beachfront surroundings.

Although Lee-Smith was a direct contemporary of Jacob Lawrence, his art followed a different trajectory, adopting an approach to realism inflected by the sense of isolation and alienation in

Edward Hopper’s work, as well as the surrealistic tendencies of Giorgio diChirico. That surrealistic edge to his work intensifies the emotional distance conveyed by the people in his paintings.