

Gifts from Steven Scott

// Orin Zahra

This year marks the thirty-fifth anniversary of the opening of the National Museum of Women in the Arts, a moment to celebrate the pivotal support of longtime donors and friends. One such committed patron is Steven Scott, a member of the NMWA Advisory Board and Baltimore-based art historian and dealer. During the museum's renovation, he has donated a number of significant artworks. Reflecting on his enduring relationship with the institution, he says, "I turned sixty years young this year and NMWA turns thirty-five. A perfect time to make my promised gifts of these highly important works by some of the most influential women artists of our time into outright gifts to the collection."

Scott's most recent gifts include a remarkable range of works on paper and photographs by artists Louise Bourgeois, Nan Goldin, Sally Mann, Ana Mendieta, Cindy Sherman, Shahzia Sikander, Laurie Simmons, and Betty Woodman. In addition, Scott donated porcelain dinner and tea service sets designed by Sherman, as well as newly purchased prints and a sculpture by Alison Saar.

Paper Views

Recently donated prints demonstrate contemporary artists' abilities to expand the traditional boundaries of printmaking. Shahzia Sikander (b. 1969) combines her background in Mughal and Persian miniature painting with personal and contemporary

imagery. Highly varied in size and medium, Sikander's works cross artistic and cultural boundaries—Hindu and Muslim, East and West, past and present, handcraft and digital technology. She created "No Parking Anytime" (2001), a series of nine photogravures, in the wake of 9/11; it reflects

on violence and loss. *Armorial Bearings* from this portfolio depicts what Sikander calls a "divine circle," comprising female legs radiating outward, as well as hands clutching ropes, swords, and axes. The mandala shape is an Eastern symbol for the universe. As the artist explains, she wanted



Shahzia Sikander, *Armorial Bearings*, from the series "No Parking Anytime," 2001; Photogravure, etching, and chine collé on paper, 18 1/4 x 14 1/2 in.; NMWA, Gift of Steven Scott, Baltimore, in honor of the artist



to explore push-pull tensions between beauty and horror, and quiet and chaos.

When Scott encountered Sikander's work, he recalls, "I was stunned by her reinterpretation of classical, pre-Modern South Asian miniature manuscript illuminations into fully contemporary investigations of Western orientalist narratives. Her feminist interrogations of gender roles, race, and sexuality were truly unique and groundbreaking."

Betty Woodman (1930–2018), too, was inspired by diverse sources, including Greek and Etruscan sculpture, Italian Baroque architecture, Tang dynasty glazing techniques, Egyptian art, and Islamic tiles. Although Woodman is celebrated for her inventive work as a ceramic artist, she also produced monotypes, woodcuts, and lithographs with the colorful exuberance seen in her pottery. Her art frequently alluded to Roman

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wall paintings and ceramics that she saw on her travels to Italy. *Pompeian Garden* (1992), a color woodcut print, depicts a window looking out into a garden and flanked by vases and vessels. The artist stated that her works inspired by Pompeii were about the views of architecture—columns, balustrades, balconies—and the ubiquitous presence of pots and earthenware that she encountered there. Woodman explored the limits of medium and genre through a visual dialogue between ceramics and the built environment.

Through Her Lens

NMWA's collection of contemporary photography is one of its strongest holdings, with works by pioneers including Cindy Sherman (b. 1954) and Laurie Simmons (b. 1949). Reaching artistic maturity in the 1970s, Sherman and Simmons formed part of the "Pictures Generation," which critically

examined the impact of media culture on society.

Sherman's groundbreaking staged self-portraits underscore the social construction of women's roles in history and contemporary society by reenacting gendered cultural stereotypes. Her limited-edition *Madame de Pompadour (née Poisson) Dinner Service* and *Breakfast/Tea Service* sets (1990) were part of a series of multiples produced in partnership with the New York firm Artes Magnus and fabricated by the Ancienne Manufacture Royale in Limoges, France.

Above: Cindy Sherman, *Madame de Pompadour (née Poisson) Dinner Service*, 1990; Limoges porcelain with silkscreen and hand-painting, dimensions variable; NMWA, Gift of Steven Scott, Baltimore, in memory of National Museum of Women in the Arts Founder Wilhelmina Cole Holladay

Sherman's self-portrait was transferred onto porcelain through a rigorous process of photo-silkscreen printing. She modeled her project after the original commission by the Madame de Pompadour in 1756 at the Manufacture Royal de Sèvres. Pompadour, who was the mistress of King Louis XIV, often ordered dinner services with decorative fish imagery, seen around the rims of Sherman's plates. The iconography referenced Pompadour's family name, Poisson, or "fish" in French.

At the center of her design, Sherman appears in eighteenth-century attire, a powdered wig, and prosthetic breasts, addressing the position of women as objects of male desire. However, in the guise of Pompadour, who was a key patron of the extravagant Sèvres ceramic wares, the artist also critiques women as consumers of luxury fashion.

For her series "New York Pictures" (2002), Simmons curated a selection of ten of her favorite photographs taken from 1976 to 2002. *Big Camera/Little Camera* juxtaposes an actual camera with a miniature version, exemplifying the artist's central interest in manipulation of scale. Simmons explained that she placed the two cameras together for scale but also as a metaphor for reality versus fiction. Her distinct visual style features dramatic lighting and accurate perspective: her tableaux appear to be believable, yet uncanny.

Simmons has famously staged scenes using dolls and miniature objects that question the stereotypically gendered roles of men and women in post-war suburban America. In *Walking Money*, an anthropomorphized figure composed of a pair of shapely doll legs attached to a

serpentine stack of coins and surrounded by loose change palpably expresses the cultural correlation between consumer fetishism and femininity. The woman-money hybrid stands with spread legs on a reflective surface that draws attention to her anatomy, further alluding to the commodification and objectification of female bodies. Of Simmons's incisive yet playful craft, Scott says, "I have always been moved by her psychologically charged approach to portrayals of these stand-ins for women and men to convey nostalgia, romance, and dreams."

Scott donated a number of works, including Sherman's porcelain sets and the Woodman print, in memory of the museum's founder, Wilhelmina Cole Holladay, who had a profound impact on him and his career trajectory as a gallery owner. Attending a special tour at the Holladay residence as a graduate student in 1986 convinced Scott of the mission and purpose of NMWA. He soon began his own collection of works by women artists to help realize the Holladays' goal of gender equity in the arts.

Eye on Reopening

Through a commitment to the museum's mission over the past three decades, Scott has enabled us to grow and strengthen the collection in new and diverse directions. As we anticipate our return to the newly renovated NMWA building next year, plans for the reinstallation of the collection are already underway. With thrilling additions from Scott and other donors, we look forward to welcoming visitors to experience the compelling and powerful stories lived and told by women artists throughout history.

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Laurie Simmons, *Big Camera/Little Camera*, from the series "New York Pictures, 1976-2002," 2002; Digital flex print, 5 1/8 x 8 1/2 in.; NMWA, Gift of Steven Scott, Baltimore, in honor of the artist

Laurie Simmons, *Walking Money*, from the series "New York Pictures, 1976-2002," 2002; Digital flex print, 8 1/2 x 5 1/8 in.; NMWA, Gift of Steven Scott, Baltimore, in honor of the artist

