

Baltimost: Baltimore Museum of Art

By Bret McCabe - October 8, 2019



Baltimore Museum of Art. Photo by Ethan McLeod

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With the recent opening of "Generations: A History of Black Abstract Art," Christopher Bedford begins delivering on the mission realignment he outlined for the Baltimore Museum of Art after becoming the director in 2016: to spotlight underrepresented artists sidelined by art history's account of America's postwar creative boom. "Generations" showcases the innovative ideas and pioneering work of artists such as Norman Lewis, Alma Thomas, Kevin Beasley and Lorna Simpson, and extends a critical invitation to

understand how these artists responded to the same political and cultural crises that prompted people such as Jackson Pollock, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg to represent the world following the global cataclysm of World War II.

"When you add to the current roster of exhibitions this fall, what you'll see is a very fulsome expression of our vision for the museum," Bedford says, alluding to current and upcoming exhibitions, which include a solo show of sculptor Melvin Edwards, a Mickalene Thomas public art commission being installed in the East Wing, and a showcase of American Women modernists.

Recharting a museum's mission is like changing the course of an ocean liner. In addition to mounting such shows as "John Waters: Indecent Exposure" and reinstalling the Contemporary Wing to put underrepresented artists back in conversation with art history, the museum sold off five works by ostensible 20th-century masters to raise funds to acquire artwork by women and artists of color.

Walking through the BMA now is a dramatically different experience than it was three years back, and the museum has only begun to turn its ideas into realities. "I would also say, and this is true on the part of the trustees and the staff, the work to achieve that vision is never done," Bedford says.

"Every season will require that amount of work, that amount of inventiveness, again and again and again, in order to reach the same bar. So ["Generations"] is both a moment of culmination and commencement. I think we're making a commitment to ourselves and to the city to keep going in exactly this way, because that's the promise I think we extended."