When the Memorial Art Gallery’s current director Jonathan Binstock first visited the museum four years ago, one of the things that impressed him the most was the institution’s collection of African-American art.

There was “a masterpiece of a painting by Jacob Lawrence,” Binstock recollected, “one of the best paintings by Kehinde Wiley, who was just commissioned to paint President Obama’s portrait ... a beautiful Elizabeth Catlett sculpture, a stunning, important work of art.”

But 50 years ago, there was a much different landscape.

A widespread institutional disregard for African-American works permeated the art world for much of the twentieth century. It wasn’t until the late 1960s and early 1970s that many museums across the country began making more of a concerted effort to incorporate African-American pieces into their permanent collections.

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During these two decades, the MAG not only acquired significant works by artists such as Romare Bearden, but it also hosted conversations on race, art, and history and established a workshop offering instruct- ional classes in the inner city. “It all came from the desire to make art accessible,” explains McCull-Hernandez.

Examples of this outreach include the art classes for students that were added in 2003 and the art classes for children that were added in 2004. “We really wanted to make art accessible to underserved communities,” she says.

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