



MAJOR ACQUISITIONS CELEBRATE MEMORIAL ART GALLERY CENTENNIAL



ROCHESTER, NY, October 8, 2013 — The Memorial Art Gallery, which today celebrates its 100th anniversary, is looking to the future with the acquisition of dramatic works by two contemporary masters.

Statue of Venus Obliterated by Infinity Nets (pictured at left) is by groundbreaking Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, who was recently the subject of a major international retrospective. *After Memling's Portrait of a Man with a Letter* (pictured at right) is by young American artist Kehinde Wiley, a master of the contemporary portrait

who was recently selected to receive a Cultural Leadership Award from the American Federation of Arts.



The two new acquisitions were unveiled during centennial festivities on October 5 and will remain on view through spring 2014 in MAG's Forman Gallery.

“How appropriate that these two works look back to the art historical past while underscoring a contemporary edginess,” says director Grant Holcomb. “In these major acquisitions, we can see the Gallery’s interest in the past and present as well as a hint of the future.”

Both Kusama and Wiley address traditional issues of beauty and form as they confront contemporary concerns about gender, sexuality, class and race. And both pay tribute to the history of art while asserting their place within it.

Yayoi Kusama

Born in Japan in 1929, Yayoi Kusama came to the US in 1957 and quickly found herself at the epicenter of the New York avant-garde thanks to her groundbreaking paintings, exhibitions and art happenings. By the time she returned home in 1973, she was, by popular account, “as famous as Andy Warhol.” Back in Japan, she continued her work despite being admitted to a psychiatric hospital where she has received treatment for her self-described “obsessional neurosis.”

Well known for her use of dense patterns of polka dots and nets, as well as her intense, large-scale environments, Kusama uses a variety of media, including painting, drawing, sculpture, film, performance and immersive installation. All her works touch upon her obsession with infinity, accumulation repetition and self-obliteration. Of the *Infinity Nets* series, she writes: “When I was a child, one day I was walking in the field, then all of a sudden, the sky became bright over the mountains, and I saw clearly the very image I was about to paint appear in the sky. I also saw violets which I was painting multiply to cover the doors, windows and even my body. It was then I learned the idea of self-obliteration. I immediately transferred the idea onto a canvas.”

Kusama has been the subject of several international retrospectives and has twice represented Japan at the Venice Biennial. In 2012 an exhibition of her recent work traveled to major institutions—Tate Modern, London; Whitney Museum, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and Reina Sofia, Madrid.

Learn more: www.yayoi-kusama.jp/e/biography/index.html

Kehinde Wiley

In the twelve years since he graduated from Yale University with a Master of Fine Arts, Kehinde Wiley has earned an international reputation for his iconic and iconoclastic works. He is best known for large-scale portraits featuring young urban men of color posing as the figures in canonical portraits; the backgrounds consist of flat, highly-decorative surfaces in eye-popping colors. With great sophistication, if not always subtlety, Wiley positions himself within the long tradition of portrait painters while disassembling our assumptions about the genre.

Born in 1977 in South Central Los Angeles, Wiley developed his unique hybrid sensibility early on. His love of the “sheer spectacle and beauty” of the European portrait tradition grew from visits to the Huntington Library, where his mother enrolled him in free weekend art classes to keep him out of a neighborhood firmly in the grip of gang culture.

The cultural layers and art historical references of a Wiley painting can be analyzed and appreciated by the most sophisticated scholars, while his masterful technique and compelling sitters connect with all museum visitors. This fluency is important to Wiley, who wants his paintings to “function as a catalyst for a different way of thinking. The very act of walking into the Los Angeles County Museum and seeing Kerry James Marshall as a kid gave me a sense of, ‘Damn, maybe I can do this.’”

Roberta Smith wrote in the *New York Times*, “The substitution of black for white faces and low for high culture created all kinds of mind-bending twists and turns, especially since Mr. Wiley, who is gay, often brought out the homoeroticism implicit in much European portraiture and used it to undercut the machismo bluster of his subjects.”

Wiley divides his time between Brooklyn and Beijing, China.

Learn more: www.kehindewiley.com/Artist_Statement.html

MAG on the web

mag.rochester.edu

Press contacts

Meg Colombo, 585.276.8934 (mcolombo@mag.rochester.edu)

Patti Giordano, 585.276.8932 (pgiordano@mag.rochester.edu)

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