

American Art

Toward Joy: New Frameworks for American Art

From Oct 4, 2024 | Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY, US

On October 4, 2024, the Brooklyn Museum will debut 'Toward Joy: New Frameworks for American Art', a transformative reinstallation of its American Art galleries and a highlight of the institution's 200th anniversary programming this fall. This collection display will bring together over 400 extraordinary artworks spanning 2,000 years—including more than 120 never-before-exhibited works. As part of the Museum's trailblazing reinterpretation of its historic collections, 'Toward Joy' will foreground Black feminist approaches to inclusive space-making and institutional critique and captivate audiences with fresh experiences with art and material culture from across the Western Hemisphere. The installation is curated by Stephanie Sparling Williams, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of American Art, alongside a team of seven curators across the departments of American Art, Arts of the Americas, and Decorative Arts and Design.

“When we began thinking about the Brooklyn Museum’s American Art collection in the context of today’s world, we knew we needed to shake off tradition and explore alternative ways of seeing and understanding our rich holdings,” says Sparling Williams. “As an art museum, the Brooklyn Museum is a site for celebrating beauty. But what does one do when beautiful artworks are entangled in ugly and often violent histories? By prioritizing care—for our audiences and the artworks—and joy, this presentation works to radically shift how we collectively navigate and engage within these historic spaces.”

The collection will be installed across eight galleries on the Museum’s fifth floor, each dedicated to a unique curatorial framework that brings together art spanning time, culture, and media from across North, Central, and South America. The experience will begin in the elevator lobby, where Jannah and Kiyanna Handy of Brooklyn’s own BLK MKT Vintage have been tapped for the interior design.

The American Art department’s curatorial process unfolded through collaboration and was supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Terra Foundation for American Art, the Brooklyn Museum’s Council for African American Art, and several key individuals. Through work with an Advisory Committee, monthly Black Feminist Roundtable conversations, biweekly team workshops spanning many of the Museum’s departments, and hundreds of discussions, the department sought to speak creatively and boldly to the many cultures and communities that the Museum serves. Building on the rich contributions of BIPOC thinkers and cultural producers, the framework model offers a way to experiment with representation in the galleries, to explore innovative curatorial ideas and actions, and to systematically center more diverse voices and perspectives.

'Toward Joy: New Frameworks for American Art' is organized by Stephanie Sparling Williams, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of American Art; Caroline Gillaspie, Assistant Curator of American Art; Catherine Futter, Senior Curator, Decorative Arts; Liz St. George, Assistant Curator, Decorative Arts; Nancy Rosoff, Andrew W. Mellon Senior Curator, Arts of the Americas; Dare Turner, Curator of Indigenous Art; with Grace Billingslea and Michael Gibson-Prugh, Curatorial Assistants, Arts of the Americas and Europe.