

Art Acquisitions

February 2011

Purchases

1. Joshua Shaw (American, born England, 1776/7-1860), *Natural Bridge No. 1: View from the Arch of the Bridge Looking down the Creek, Rockbridge County, Virginia*, ca. 1820, oil and pencil on prepared paper, 10¼ x 13" (image: 6¾ x 9¾"). J. Harwood and Louise B. Cochrane Fund



for American Art and partial gift of Robert M. Hicklin, Jr. in honor of Wiley Hardy Wheat, Virginia Walker Christian, and Maria Gregory Tabb on the occasion of VMFA's 75th anniversary (2011.9).

This gemlike painting belongs to a series of eight oils (once thought lost) of southern landscapes by the Anglo-American artist, author, traveler, and inventor Joshua Shaw. He envisioned painting a number of key American scenes to be turned into prints for sale to the country's burgeoning middle class, but the

money ran out before all of his images, including this one, could be issued. The published version, *Picturesque Views of American Scenery*, remains the earliest, most comprehensive aquatint portfolio of landscapes and landmarks ever produced in the United States.

Unlike most depictions of Virginia's celebrated natural wonder, Shaw's vista is from the top of the bridge with an emphasis on the picturesque landscape of Rockbridge County below. The figure who leans precariously over the ledge may be the artist, if not his fifteen-year-old son, who traveled with him. Like many subsequent painters (including Jervis McEntee, whose on-the-spot sketch of the Natural Bridge is on view in an adjacent gallery), Shaw recorded his thoughts about the geological site, finding it "a delightful spot for thought and contemplation, shut out from the noise and bustle of man."

This partial gift-partial purchase, made possible by the generous donor, Robert Hicklin, and funds provided by the museum's leading patrons Louise and Harwood Cochrane, marks VMFA's 75th anniversary. It complements an Italian landscape by the pioneering Shaw and a later, more traditional plein-air oil sketch of Natural Bridge by the second-generation Hudson River School painter, Jervis McEntee, already in VMFA's collection.

Dr. Sylvia Yount
Chief Curator and Louise B. and J. Harwood Cochrane
Curator of American Art

2. Jun Kaneko (Japanese, born 1942, active in the United States since 1963), *Untitled, Mission Clay Pittsburg Project*, 2004-2007, glazed ceramic, 104¼ x 21¾ x 56¼". Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund (2011.2).



Jun Kaneko
Mission Clay - Pittsburg Project 2007
Untitled, Dango, glazed ceramic, 9.5' high x 4' wide
photo credit: Dix Baxter

Jun Kaneko is one of today's leading ceramic artists. A selection of his monumental sculptures inaugurated VMFA's Robins Sculpture Garden in 2010 as the first of an ongoing series of outdoor changing exhibitions. One piece remained after the exhibition closed as a new addition to the museum's permanent collection. It is currently on display outdoors, joined by eight additional sculptures from VMFA's holdings.

Kaneko came to the United States in 1963 at age 21 to study painting. He soon became part of a movement that sought to infuse ceramics with the excitement and ambition of the most advanced painting and sculpture. He is now internationally renowned for his large, boldly painted free-standing fired ceramics. The VMFA acquisition belongs to an ongoing series of slender upright forms, called *dangos* after the Japanese word for dumpling. Each piece takes several years to create, including six months to dry, followed by two six-week-long firings with a glazing stage in between. They are fired in a 20-foot-tall Victorian-era beehive kiln at the Mission Clay Products sewer-pipe factory in Pittsburg, Kansas.

John B. Ravenal

The Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art

3. Walter Crane (British, 1845-1915), designer, and Richard Joyce (British, 1873-1931), decorator, for Pilkington's Tile & Pottery Company (British (Clifton Junction, Manchester), founded 1892), *Charger*, designed 1904-06, made 1912, earthenware, gold and ruby luster, 19" dia. Funds given in honor of Frederick R. Brandt by The Council of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Nancy and Raymond Hunt, Dr. John M. Alexander and Mrs. Helen Inconstant Alexander, the Brownell Family, and the Sydney and Frances Lewis Endowment Fund and the Swenson Art Nouveau Fund (2011.8).



The decoration on this charger was created by Walter Crane, one of the most important designers of the late 19th century. A key participant in the Anglo-American Aesthetic movement and a leading exponent of the British Arts and Crafts movement, Crane designed book illustrations, stained glass, wallpaper, ceramics, and textiles. His design of *Saint George and the Dragon* seen here relates to his illustration in an 1894 publication of Edmond Spenser's *Faerie Queen*. This plate is inscribed with the words *Un Chevalier Sans Peur et Sans Reproche* (A Knight Without Fear and Without Reproach).

All of Crane's designs for the Pilkington's Tile & Pottery Company were executed in "Lancastrian Lustre;" Lancastrian refers to the location of the company in Lancaster County, England, while lustre means the pearly sheen or luster on the pottery's surface. This sheen was achieved by applying a glaze of various materials including metallic oxides and red-brick clay and then manipulating the firing process to various temperatures.

Barry Shifman

Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator Decorative Arts 1890 to the Present

4. Korean, Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), *Covered Jar with Peony Design*, late 19th century, Haeju ware; porcelain with underglaze cobalt blue decoration, 9½ x 8¼". East Asian Art Deaccessioning Funds (2011.1a-b).

This global jar is an excellent example of blue-and-white porcelain produced at Haeju, Hwanghae province in North Korea in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. The expressive brushwork and the imperfection in the clay and glaze are characteristic of Haeju ceramics, created at folk kilns for daily use by common people.

Haeju ware is named after Haeju, a port located on the west coast of the Korea peninsula. It has a long history of trading with China and other Asian countries. Haeju is known for a type of porcelain decorated with cobalt blue. After the fall of the Joseon dynasty in 1893 and the decline of the imperial kilns at Bunwon, Haeju ware flourished from the 1890s through the early 20th century.

Li Jian

E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Curator of East Asian Art

5. Six Photographs:
Margaret Bourke-White (American, 1904-1971), two vintage silver gelatin photographs: *Lace Factory*, 1931, 14 x 11"; and *Iron Puddler*, 1930, 14 x 11". Floyd D. and Anne C. Gottwald Fund (2010.197, 2010.198).

Margaret Bourke-White, the best known of the group, made her early reputation documenting the steel mills of Cleveland, Ohio. These two striking vintage prints date from a different, equally acclaimed series that found "beauty in industry" and added another first to her name—as the earliest Western photographer allowed to take documentary photographs inside the Soviet Union after the 1917 revolution. Hired in 1929 as associate editor and staff photographer for Henry Luce's new business magazine, *Fortune*, Bourke-White obtained a travel visa to Russia the following year. Over the next five weeks she roamed the vast country, shooting dams, factories, farms, and workers. Her nearly three thousand negatives represent the first complete documentation of the newly emerging Soviet Union and Stalin's so-called Five-Year Plan.

Iron Puddler first appeared in the article "Soviet Panorama" (*Fortune* 111, February 1931, 65), with the caption: "The Red October' Rolling Mills in Stalingrad." *The Lace Factory* dates from a 1931 trip to Russia on assignment for the *New York Times Magazine*. Both images augment Bourke-White's presence in VMFA's collection (which to date features only an atypical American subject—*The Moneylender's House*, 1947), while also marking an important historical moment when many Americans admired Russia's industrial vigor and dynamic social change.

Morris Engel (American, 1918-2005), *Mother and Children, Window, Harlem*, 1940, silver gelatin print, 11 x 14". Floyd D. and Anne C. Gottwald Fund (2010.195).

Brooklyn-born Morris Engel, in 1936, joined New York's Photo League, where he met Aaron Siskind, Berenice Abbot, and Paul Strand, who invited him to work on his film *Native Land*. In 1939, Engel had his first solo exhibition at the New School for Social Research. He worked briefly for the newspaper *PM*, before joining the Navy in 1941 as a combat photographer. In the early 1950s, Engel turned to independent filmmaking, pioneering the use of the handheld 35 mm camera in his work with then-girlfriend (later wife), photographer Ruth Orkin. Their first feature, *Little Fugitive*, proved to be highly influential for the French New Wave director François Truffaut, as well as for younger American filmmakers John Cassavetes and Martin Scorsese.

Mother and Children, Window, Harlem dates from Engel's early New York street imagery and his acquaintance with a particular woman. He photographed "Rebecca" and her family for two weeks in her Harlem neighborhood—a familiarity that shapes the intimate mood of the image. This silver print represents the first work by Engel to enter VMFA's collection.

Wright Morris (American, 1910-1998), *Uncle Harry, Home Place, Norfolk, Nebraska*, 1947, 8x10". Floyd D. and Anne C. Gottwald Fund (2010.193).

Wright Morris—novelist, essayist, photographer—is widely acclaimed for his verbal and visual portrayals of his native Great Plains. As a young boy in the 1920s, Morris spent two summers on his aunt and uncle's farm near Norfolk, Nebraska. In 1948 he published memories of this time in *The Home Place* (1948), a "photo-text" that juxtaposed photographs with fictional text based in reality. The silver print of *Uncle Harry* belongs to this pioneering project that captured the wear and tear of rural daily life; the image's accompanying text observes that "the pattern for living, for hanging in there, can be seen in the white stitches in the denim." Morris's lifelong effort to retrieve a part of his lost childhood informed his lyrical prose and photography, imbuing these influential experiments with poignant melancholy.

The first print by Morris to be acquired by the museum, *Uncle Harry* is that much more significant due to its previous owner—the 1930s photographer Marion Post Wolcott. Her work for the Farm Security Administration (FSA) is represented by the similarly affecting photograph of North Carolina tobacco workers, purchased by VMFA from Halsted Gallery in 2008.

Max Yavno (American, 1911-1985), *Army Street, San Francisco*, 1947, silver gelatin photograph, 11x14". Floyd D. and Anne C. Gottwald Fund (2010.196).

New York-born Max Yavno established his reputation in the 1940s with striking black and white photographs of postwar Los Angeles and San Francisco. His early experience shooting New York scenes for the WPA's Federal Theater Project served him well when he settled on the West Coast. Applying artful compositional strategies to everyday vignettes of humanity, Yavno infused his urban landscapes, even those

devoid of people—such as *Army Street, San Francisco*—with a noisy rhythm, theatrical lighting, and highly ordered sense of design. Yavno is also acclaimed as a “craftsman-printer” who would spend hours in the darkroom perfecting an image. This silver print joins an earlier San Francisco scene (*Ferry Building, 1936*) in the museum’s collection.

All of the above mid-twentieth century photographs would more than hold their own in the American Art galleries, hanging alongside paintings and sculptures that explore similar subjects and themes. Thanks are owed to the Gottwald family for their generous endorsement of this new collecting area for VMFA’s American Art department.

André Kertész (b. Hungary, 1894-1985), *New York, 1972*, vintage silver gelatin photograph, 8 x10”. VMFA Art Purchase Fund (2010.194).

Similarly, André Kertész’s *New York* enriches the museum’s modern photography collection. The Hungarian-born artist first established himself in avant-garde circles in 1920s Paris. Like many European artists wary of the growing strength of the Nazi party, Kertész arrived in New York in 1936, becoming a naturalized citizen eight years later. In 1952, he and his wife moved to a 12th-floor apartment near Washington Square Park, the setting for some of his best-known photographs. Kertész distinguished himself with striking urban scenes of his adopted city, such as this bird’s-eye view of a corner of the Greenwich Village park, made with a telephoto lens. The vintage silver print becomes the third work by the artist in VMFA’s collection and his first New York image.

Dr. Sylvia Yount

Chief Curator and Louise B. and J. Harwood Cochrane Curator of American Art

6. *Man’s Wrapper* (“Kente” cloth), 20th century, Akan or Ewe culture (Ghana, Togo), cotton. Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund (2011.3).
Man’s Wrapper (“Kente” cloth), 20th century, Akan culture (Ghana), rayon or silk. Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund (2011.4).
Man’s Wrapper (“Kente” cloth), 20th century, Akan culture (Ghana), cotton, Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund (2011.5).

Dazzling Akan and Ewe textiles—popularly known as “kente” cloth—are by far the most celebrated and recognizable African textiles worldwide. Kente cloth is hand woven in long, narrow strips of brightly colored threads. The strips are cut to length and stitched side by side to make a cloth approximately seven feet by ten feet that is used as a toga-style wrapper. Each strip is enlivened by long stripes in the warp threads. Weft-faced (crossing) stripes and many other creative designs are added by means of skillfully weaving the weft threads through varied combinations of the warp threads. The process demands great concentration, skill, and inventiveness by the weaver. These three spectacular kente cloths highlight an important aspect of

VMFA's collection of African textiles and assure ongoing presence of these visually stunning weavings in the gallery through a program of periodic rotation.

Richard B. Woodward
Curator of African Art

7. *Blue and White Cloth*, 20th century, Dogon culture (Mali), cotton, wool, Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund (2011.6).

This stunning blue and white textile is the first cloth from Mali's historic Dogon culture to enter the collection. In Mali, the history of weaving on a narrow loom dates back well more than a millennium and it was from there that the strip loom, or narrow-band loom, as it is known, dispersed to other areas of West Africa where it has long been the traditional standard for hand-woven cloth. This textile exemplifies the Dogon love of deep indigo blue contrasted with geometric designs in the natural white of the cotton or wool.

Richard B. Woodward
Curator of African Art

8. *Belt for a Priest of Eshu or Shango*, 19th- 20th century, Yoruba culture (Nigeria, Republic of Benin), cotton, glass beads, cowries, leather. Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund (2011.7).

This lavishly ornamented work is a belt for a priest of the deity Eshu or Shango, of the Yoruba culture in Nigeria and Republic of Benin. It is heavily worn from years of use, a sure sign of its significance. As a highly valued religious robe, at some point, it might have been retired to a shrine or left there as an offering after the passing of a priest.

Richard B. Woodward
Curator of African Art

About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

With a collection of art that spans the globe and more than 5,000 years, plus a wide array of special exhibitions, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) is recognized as one of the top comprehensive art museums in the United States. The museum's permanent collection encompasses more than 23,000 works of art, including the largest public collection of Fabergé outside Russia and one of the nation's finest collections of American art, Art Nouveau and Art Deco. VMFA is home to acclaimed collections of English Silver and Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British Sporting and Modern & Contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan and African art. In May 2010, VMFA opened its doors to the public after a transformative expansion, the largest in its 75-year history. Programs include educational activities and studio classes for all ages, plus fun after-hours events. VMFA's Statewide Partnership program includes traveling exhibitions, artist and

teacher workshops, and lectures across the Commonwealth. General admission is always free. For additional information, telephone 804-340-1400 or visit www.vmfa.museum.

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