EXHIBITS

March 14–October 12, 2020

STEVEN KINDER **552,830**

Jamie/Chocolate (2018), acrylic, pencil, and pastel on canvas, 96 x 72 inches [detail]

For centuries, portraiture has been used to celebrate the politically and socially powerful, but there is also a rich history of artists throughout time using portraiture to capture the outcast or "othered." Throughout his career, Dutch master Rembrandt van Rijn drew and etched beggars of all kinds—orphans, the mentally ill, panhandlers—particularly those who rejected public assistance and chose to live on the streets. To this group he gave his most empathetic, compassionate, and consistent gaze. Spaniard Francisco de Goya, best known for his large-scale portraits of Spanish aristocracy and of the brutalities of war, privately recorded the elderly and ill for years. French Post-Impressionist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, famous for portraying dancers at the Moulin Rouge, also captured the private moments of sex workers bathing or tending to themselves in

brothels—and these remain some of his most poignant and brilliant works. In 20th century America, the Social Realists of the 1930s, including John Biggers, Dorothea Lange, and Thomas Hart Benton, chronicled those hit hardest by the Great Depression, racism, social marginalization, and war. The list goes on.

Today there is a robust resurgence of artists using portraiture to explore themes of social inequity, with a focus on cultures that have been suppressed, excluded, violated, and silenced. Works by artists Kerry James Marshall, Mickalene Thomas, Amy Sherald (who painted First Lady Michelle Obama's portrait for the National Portrait Gallery), Kehinde Wiley (who painted President Barack Obama's portrait), Titus Kaphar, Henry Taylor, and Aliza Nisenbaum, among others, are reaching international audiences and attracting critical acclaim. Embedded in their work are questions about who gets to be depicted, celebrated, and remembered in art. Whose histories and narratives are being repeated in art and society, and why? Who has been erased and ignored from the stories over time? Who is the actual subject of portrait painting: the sitter, the painter, or the viewer?

When we think of homelessness, we often and too easily think in broad categories. "Homeless," like "migrant" or "immigrant," is a blanket term used to describe hundreds of thousands of individuals with vastly differing personal stories and circumstances. The terms "unsheltered" or "housing insecure" are now also making their way into our vernacular as more sensitive alternatives, but can language help widen compassion or offer solutions? In the end, if we haven't experienced being unsheltered ourselves, what do we truly understand about it? Can art help build a bridge?

552,830 is an important contribution to this national conversation, particularly in a town like Brattleboro, Vermont, which, like many communities throughout the United States, is struggling with issues around housing insecurity.

The exhibition title refers to the total number of Americans who experienced homelessness in 2018, but Kinder has been meeting and working with people on the street for years, asking permission to take their photographs and offering compensation for the opportunity to paint their portraits. He is determined not to exploit or compromise anyone. If they don't want to engage, he thanks them and walks away. It's a business exchange for Kinder, but one with a heart. He is not speaking for the unsheltered. He simply wants to offer us a perspective on and a reflection of the person who has captured his attention.

And after that? He simply asks us to see them. To do this, he has removed all the signifiers of the immediate conditions in which they live. No cardboard boxes, cups, signs with messages, or blankets. There are sometimes pets included in his works, but the sitters always choose their own poses on their own terms.

Although Kinder has many years of experience educating himself about homelessness as a supporter of the national organization The Coalition for The Homeless, he does not comment on the conditions that brought each portrait sitter here. Instead, he guides our experience as viewers. Large, unstretched canvases hang from the ceiling by a simple system of hooks and string. To see the images, we need to lift our chins and eyes, as we would if we were looking at a historical portrait in an institution. This type of viewing is not typical of our experience walking by a rough sleeper. In that case, we usually look down, hoping to step over or pass by without any engagement, indifferent, our eyes often averted. Here, however, we have to transcend our normal way of moving through the world to engage with the art and, more importantly, with the people in the portraits.

Perhaps most poignantly, Kinder masterfully elicits from his sitters a sweet reveal of their true personalities—however briefly witnessed by him. We see this in Carmen's wonderfully flirty smirk, or Chocolate tenderly touching the side of Jamie's face, or Donna's palms gently pressed together and extended towards us in prayer. These small but meaningful gestures remind us that each person depicted is unique, someone who deserves to be seen, not compartmentalized, and not defined solely or even mainly by the hardships they are currently experiencing. Through Kinder's art we not only see them, we feel their humanity as we register their steady gaze right back at us.

— Katherine Gass Stowe, Curator

This exhibit is supported in part by a grant from the Thomas Thompson Trust.

LEFT:
Artist study for *Willie* (2018)

RIGHT:
Carmen (2018)
acrylic, pencil, and pastel on canvas
96 x 72 inches

COFFEE AND CONVERSATION STORIES OF HOMELESSNESS

"It's about treating people as people." — Liz LaVorgna

Coffee & Conversation is a multimedia project that aims to change the way people think about homelessness. The project was started in Brattleboro in 2015 by artist Liz LaVorgna, in collaboration with filmmaker Wyatt Andrews and with support from Groundworks Collaborative.

The project brings together people who have stable housing and people who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness, offering both parties a chance to look beyond stereotypes and stigma and connect as human beings, over a cup of coffee.

These conversations help us look past what we have been told about who, what, and how homeless people are, to see the real people and stories behind the statistics. The hope is that these dialogues will help our community to connect and to treat one other with kindness, respect, and dignity.

Here, LaVorgna revisits the project in 2019–20, updating some of the original stories, introducing new stories, and documenting how the landscape has changed for unhoused people in Brattleboro in the intervening years.

This exhibit is supported in part by a grant from the Thomas Thompson Trust.

Brian and Chris (2015), photograph

ROGER CLARK MILLER **TRANSMUTING THE PROSAIC**

I explore naturally occurring events that are often considered ordinary, mundane, or unwanted. Whether it is traffic patterns, rock formations, cricket calls, or the structure of dreams, I strive to transform these everyday, often rejected occurrences and open up the doors behind them. Some elements of the work have as much control over the outcome as I do, which lessens my ego as a creator. The environment and I are equal partners in the creative process.

In the *Davis Square Symphony*, the bustle of Davis Square in Somerville, Massachusetts, has been translated into an orchestral score. Vehicles become strings, pedestrians shift into wind instruments, and bicycles emerge as snare drums. Traffic, which is generally considered irritating and unpleasant, has been transformed into a work of unique beauty. Translating these prosaic phenomena into poetry is akin to the ancient alchemical dream of transmuting lead into gold.

Inspired by John Cage and Marcel Duchamp, *Pop Record Evolving* transforms the pops and surface noise from my record collection into source material for a recording that began in 1984 and constantly evolves. By isolating these flaws in the recorded form, I allow the sounds to create their own score. All of my *Modified Vinyl* pieces toy with the idea of records and the ways that permutations of this medium can produce provocative results not commonly associated with their initial intent.

As the co-founder, guitarist, and vocalist for the art-punk band Mission of Burma, I found a medium to channel both my creativity and my critique of society. Lyric sheets were in vogue, giving the illusion of elevating simple words to the level of poetry. By creating a lyric sheet where all the words were placed in alphabetical order for our critically acclaimed 1981 *Signals, Calls, and Marches* EP, we created a wry commentary on corporate interference in the artistic process. The *Signals, Calls, and Marches Lyric Sheet* installation includes those same words inked onto a record. At the listening station, I isolated each word from the record in alphabetical order, precisely like the lyric sheet. One can read the lyrics and listen to the isolated words from the record at the same time.

The music of Johann Sebastian Bach can be viewed as a series of perfect mathematical musical gestures. In the piece *Four Bars of a Bach Fugue*, to get a radical result from the same material, I etched the treble and bass clef of four bars onto a blank record with a screwdriver. When this material is translated by a record needle, the result is quite different from the piece's original intention. (For the record, I enjoy playing Bach on the piano.)

— Roger Clark Miller

This exhibit is supported in part by a grant from the Artists' Resource Trust.

"POP Record/evolving" Cover (1985)
modified vinyl
7 x 7 inches [detail]

ALISON WRIGHT **GRIT AND GRACE, WOMEN AT WORK**

"The light! It's so beautiful," she said breathlessly. "I've got to catch the light before it changes!" She kicked off her high heels and flew off in an evening gown and bare feet into the sunset, juggling her considerably bulky camera equipment. It was 2009, and I had just met Alison Wright at a press preview at a hotel in Dubai, U.A.E. As I watched all the other photographers and journalists turn their backs on the view and voraciously dig into the buffet, I thought to myself, "Wow. Now that's a woman at work." That trip began a fruitful professional relationship and a wonderful friendship with one of the most determined and intrepid humans I have ever had the pleasure of knowing.

Helena, Agricultural Co-op Farmer in Morogoro, Tanzania (2012)
dye-sublimated archival aluminum print
28 x 42 inches

Wright has been documenting distant, delicate, and disappearing cultures, as well as areas stricken by war, poverty, and natural disasters, for decades. Her work has garnered many awards, and she writes and speaks about her experiences in deeply moving ways. Her dedicated focus on the beauty of indigenous tribes and rapidly disappearing ways of life recalls for me the work of Edward Sheriff Curtis (1868–1952), who painstakingly photographed the people of the American West in his masterwork *The North American Indian*.

While Wright has made countless voyages around the world on humanitarian assignments, *Grit and Grace, Women at Work* is her passion project, begun when she was on assignment in Nicaragua in 2012. There she witnessed the resilience of women in the most difficult circumstances, supporting their children by searching through landfills for rubber and other materials for one dollar a day. In the years since, her travels have taken her to Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Japan, Tanzania, the Congo, Myanmar, Liberia, Bangladesh, Mexico, and many more countries to witness women working to survive and to transform their communities.

The many subtexts for this body of work are rich. Of course the project has women and gender at its center, but it is also about the labor the women do, the tools they use, the innovations they make, the power of ownership and economic development they experience, and, most importantly for them, why they do what they do—for their children to have a better life. The overarching human themes reveal themselves, too, including the never-to-be-underestimated power of education, community, collaboration, and having a sense of purpose.

Concurrently, this project exposes some of the world's harshest physical and emotional conditions—and our connection to them. Even from far away, we are unfortunately complicit in keeping these conditions locked in place. Many of the things we consume come from the labors of these hardworking women. We create demand through the clothes we buy in "fast fashion" stores, our habitual reach for single-use plastic and plastics of all kinds, and the relentless throw-away mentality of our commercial consumer world. Larger environmental problems, like catastrophic drought, fire, and flooding, are brought on by the use of fossil fuels that perpetuate and aggravate these conditions. When we start to re-evaluate and change our behaviors, we will help to loosen the grip on global manufacturing and environmental destruction that our economic demand for products has created.

Grit and Grace, Women at Work is Alison Wright's first solo museum exhibition in America. March, when this exhibition opened, is also Women's History Month, and 2020 marks the historic 100th anniversary of the amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting women the right to vote. National Geographic celebrated this milestone with the book *WOMEN: The National Geographic Image Collection*, featuring iconic images of women throughout time and around the globe, including two of Wright's images. This exhibition is not only timely but is a powerful reminder that each of these photographs and the women in them reveal perhaps the most important truth of all: that our past, present, and future actions impact and affect each other deeply, no matter where in the world we are.

— Katherine Gass Stowe, Curator

The artist wishes to thank Darlene and Jeff Anderson for their generous support. This exhibit and related events are supported in part by a grant from the Vermont Women's Fund.

Dativa, Brick-Maker in Kayonza, Rwanda (2014)
dye-sublimated archival aluminum print
24 x 36 inches

WESLEY FLEMING **SILVESTRIS, WILD AND UNTAMED**

Silvestris, adjective (Latin): "found/situated/living in woodlands"

Wild columbine, jack in the pulpit, and other signs of spring are evident earlier than usual here in Vermont, thanks to Wesley Fleming's exquisitely detailed glass creations, which have taken root in our Spotlight Gallery. Fleming forms these delicate sculptures by moving colored rods of glass in and out of the flame of a propane torch to reach a temperature between 2,000 and 4,000 degrees. The artist then masterfully pulls, twists, and shapes the molten glass into remarkably lifelike specimens. These moments, captured in glass, remind us of the beauty and activity all around us in the natural world.

— Linda Whelihan, Curator

Cypripedium acaule, Pink Ladyslipper (2020), hot sculpted glass, 13 x 4 x 2 inches. Photo by Victor Janczar.

POSTCARDS TO BRATTLEBORO 40 YEARS OF MAIL ART

Stuart Copans' artwork speaks through the simple tools and materials of everyday life: paper, scissors, postcards, and stamps. The art he creates moves quietly around the world through a distribution network operated by an enormous postal bureaucracy. Mail carriers in Brattleboro, Vermont, know about Copans' unusual mail, and mail clerks participate (unaware or voluntarily) in the placement of postmarks and other rubber cancellation marks.

Mail art senders are also receivers. In fact, in the world of mail art, the address IS the art, and mail carriers are heroes! This exhibition is a testimony to what Copans has received through many years of participation in what would otherwise be an invisible art form, hidden to all except the local post folks. Said Copans, "Postal officials appreciate my mail, even the inflated water toy that looked like a dragon!" No wonder he is a legend in Brattleboro to all who handle his mail.

There is no simple explanation of what Copans does, even though his intricate mailings employ standard tools. He is prolific with the objects he creates for intentional postings, whether postcards, artists' books, stamps, poetry, or objects he finds, like driftwood from the Connecticut River. On one occasion, Copans sent CrackerJack Kid a box of pistachio shells, each marked with whimsical faces, that fell out of their box—all 100 shells everywhere on the Kid's kitchen floor. Was this planned, was it an accident, or was it a box of serendipity?

Copans' postcards and philatelic "first-day covers" are festooned with rubber stamps, whimsical doodles, eloquent cut-outs, drawings on birch bark, poems, ditties, and Rorschach-like silhouettes, cut with fantastic agility and speed. All of Copans' mail art appears under the mysterious pseudonym "Shmuel," a name that has come to personify something beautiful, weird, and unexpected. For nearly fifty years, recipients have welcomed Shmuel's sendings in anticipation of objects that are fascinating, intriguing, mysterious, provocative, and humorous. Opening his mail is always an event!

Postcards to Brattleboro includes mail art from Shmuel to another New England mail artist, CrackerJack Kid (yours truly). Also included in this exhibition are mail art ephemera that Copans received from Kandy Phillips, Walt Evans, Julie Hagan Bloch, John Bennett, Jazzy Lupa, Peter Dudley, Andrea Jay, and Ryosuke Cohen. Finding these artists' mail art involved searching through numerous packages and boxes in Copans' extensive mail art archive. His collection is estimated to include over 25,000 artifacts. It is one of New England's best-kept secrets—until now.

— Chuck Welch, Curator

STEVEN ROSE **FOR/WHILE (2020.01)**

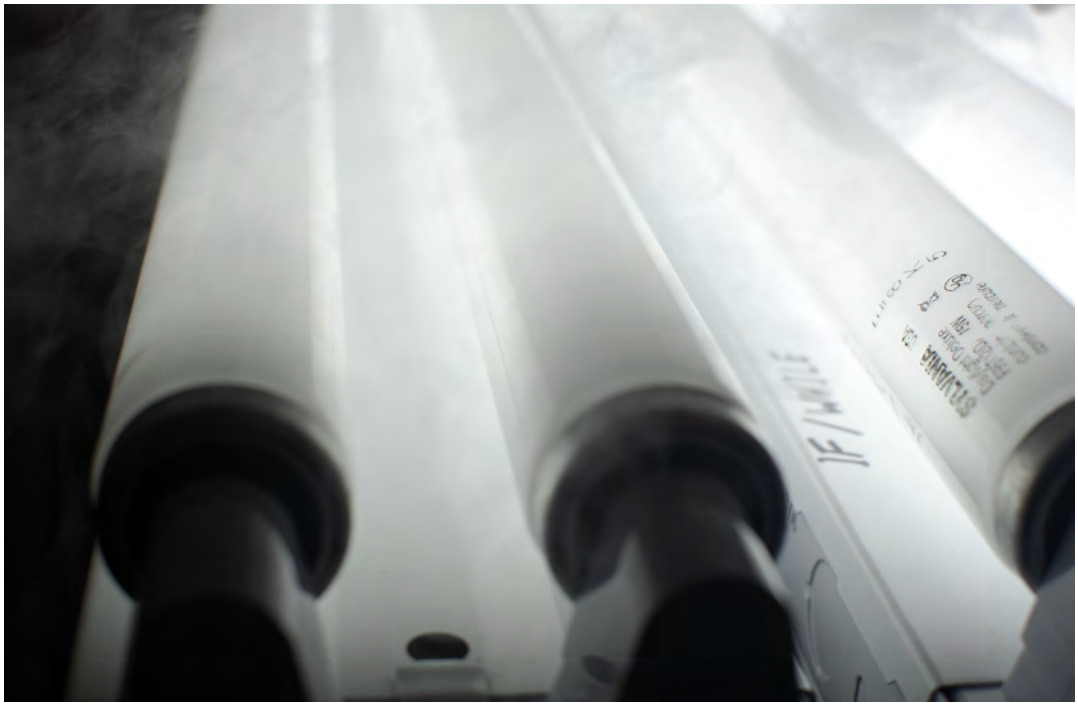
The moment I saw one of Steven Rose's gently swaying fluorescent light fixtures, I was intrigued and amused. Transforming a mundane, industrial object of lackluster design into an art object is a long-standing practice in modern art. I sensed, however, that Rose's use of ready-made materials went beyond humor, irony, or cultural comment à la Marcel Duchamp. The rhythmic movement of his light, its steady, ceaseless swing, hinted at forces greater than were visible.

A "perpetual motion" machine I'd had as a child came to mind—an open frame with five weighted chrome beads suspended in a row. When the first bead was pulled back and released, it struck the next bead, transferring energy along the row until the last bead swung out, then back with equal force in the opposite direction. This demonstrated Newton's third law of motion: for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. I recognized a similarity between this toy and Rose's light-fixture installation. But to fully grasp what I was experiencing, I needed more context—an extra-aesthetic tutorial. I asked Rose what gave rise to the work. He talked about energy transfer, the force of gravity, and motion he experienced during an earthquake. Once I understood the magnitude of his inspiration, I knew an expanded version had to be created in Brattleboro. I invite you to sit quietly, attune your body and breath to the pulse of the installation, and experience, for a while, that which is both seen and unseen.

— Mara Williams, Chief Curator

In 2011 a 5.8-magnitude earthquake struck Virginia, traveling up the east coast to the Hudson River warehouse where I sat calmly working on computers. Around me I felt the concrete turn gelatinous for a few seconds and then abruptly go back to normal. Alarms sounded, but I could not move. I sat transfixed by the sight above me—a ceiling full of eight-foot fluorescent light fixtures all swaying in concert, end-to-end, in the most orderly manner. This sublime folding of chaos into order by nature has had a lasting impact on me and is central to my ongoing installation series *For/While.*

— Steven Rose



For/While (2020.01)
installation [detail]

JOHN GIBSON **JAZZ**

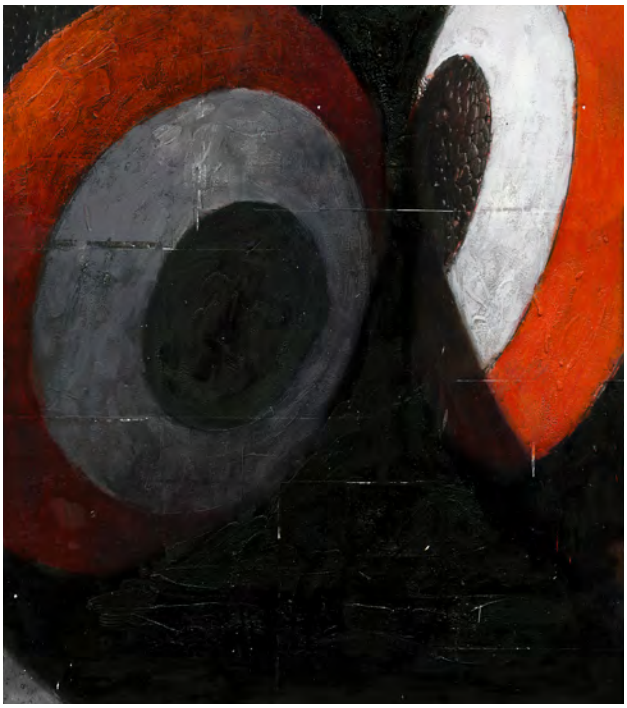
Sometime late in 2018, BMAC Director Danny Lichtenfeld approached me with a proposal to redo the outdoor window treatments at the Museum. I found the prospect of working with the windows thrilling. I had never worked on such a scale or in such a site-specific and public way before. The sequence of images, their relationship to the building, the color—everything posed an exciting challenge. Getting excited about the project, though, was the easy part. The more difficult task was to decide what to do.

For more than 30 years, I have been making paintings of balls, decorated most often with dots or stripes. Although I have painted them exclusively for so long, it's not really balls themselves that I find so interesting. I admire their endlessness and mystery, and I love the way a circle sits on the surface of a ball and bends into space. I paint balls because they are the most fundamentally different thing from the flat surface of a painting that I can think of. Every day, I try to wring a "real" ball out of a flat surface, and every day I can't quite do it. In the good paintings, there is some residue of that effort, and in the best paintings, there is a lot. In many ways, the subject of these paintings—at least for me—is just that residue: a wish for something that cannot be had, a version of a ball overlaid with desire.

Coming up with a plan for the project meant spending time in and around the Museum and studying it from as many viewpoints as possible. The color of the stone, the low slouch of the roofline, and even the landscape behind needed to be taken into account. Using Photoshop mock-ups, I experimented with all kinds of possibilities. Eventually, I began to work with pieces of paintings that might or might not be connected to each other behind the stone walls between the windows, which immediately created an illusion that giant balls were actually inside the Museum, rolling around in the galleries.

Each image was painted separately, scanned, blown up to scale, and printed on material suitable for the outdoors. Suddenly, the relationship between figure and ground had become more complex. There was still the relationship of the painted ball to the painted background, but now there was also the "real" space of the building, both in relation to the facade and to the pictorial space that had opened up inside. The two "opposing forces" that I had been working on for years (the ball and everything around it) now included a third element: the Museum itself.

— John Gibson



The artist wishes to thank Jonathan Gitelson, who skillfully guided the transformation of five small paintings into their giant counterparts.

Jazz #4 (2020)
digital print on vinyl
96 x 84 inches

Major support for the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center is provided by our members and

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HOURS
Wednesday through Sunday.....11-5
Monday and Tuesday.....Closed

Please call or check the website for holiday closures, change of exhibits, and special events. Administrative offices are open weekdays 9-5.

ADMISSION
As of June 18, 2020, in light of the financial hardship caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, admission is on a "pay-as-you-wish" basis. Please check the website for details.

LOCATION, PARKING, ACCESSIBILITY
BMAC is located in Union Station, at the foot of Main Street in downtown Brattleboro, Vermont. Parking is available in front of the museum and next door at 28 Vernon Street. BMAC is wheelchair-accessible.

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WOLF KAHN & EMILY MASON GALLERY
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CENTER GALLERY
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SOUTH GALLERY
Postcards to Brattleboro: 40 Years of Mail Art

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