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Cleveland Museum of Art adds works by Cezanne, Rashid Johnson, Melvin Edwards to its collection

Steven Litt

9 January 2022



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Image: "Standing Broken Men," 2021, by Rashid Johnson. Cleveland Museum of Art

A handful of acquisitions joined the permanent collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art in December, including a watercolour by Paul Cezanne, and a massive work in mosaic by the contemporary American artist Rashid Johnson.

Also joining the collection were three sculptures from the series "Lynch Fragments," by Melvin Edwards, another contemporary American artist.

The museum characterized the works by Johnson and Edwards, both of whom are Black, as part of its "commitment to diversifying its collections."

The Cezanne watercolour adds to the museum's holdings of works by the artist, including three landscapes in oil on canvas, plus two lithographs and two drawings.

Cezanne is considered a pivotal figure in the history of modern art who sought to endow the Impressionist style with a sense of gravity and solidity, rather than to focus on capturing fleeting effects of light and weather.

The watercolour, entitled "Footpath in the Woods," depicts a pathway amid the chestnut forests on the estate of Jas de Bouffan in Aix in southern France, a property Cezanne inherited from his father, and where he lived and painted for decades.



Image: "Footpath in the Woods," 1882-84, by Paul Cézanne. Cleveland Museum of Art

Dated 1882-84, the watercolour comes from a pivotal period in which Cezanne turned from the thick paint and turgid brushwork of his early career to lighter colours and a method of building up solid forms with layers of directional strokes resembling tiles in a mosaic.

The watercolour reflects a way of seeing in which Cezanne appears to rebuild nature through solid forms sketched in pencil and brushed in transparent planes of colour, separated by blank areas of paper.

"This experimental approach allowed Cézanne to interrogate vision itself as if to suggest that seeing occurs just as much through absence as it does presence," the museum said in its news release.

The museum plans to exhibit the drawing in an upcoming exhibition on French drawings in its collection, opening on January 20, 2023.

The mosaic and mixed-media work by Johnson, entitled "Standing Broken Men," represents an abstract, fractured figure who stares wide-eyed at the viewer.

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Completed in 2021, the work adds to the four works by Johnson already owned by the museum. It “can be interpreted as a poignant reflection on the time when it was made, defined by a global pandemic and a heightened reckoning with racial inequality,” the museum said in its news release.

The Johnson, which measures nearly 8 feet high by more than 6 feet wide, was donated to the museum by Cleveland native and philanthropist Agnes Gund and will go on view in the museum’s contemporary galleries in March.



Image: Left to right: "Long Term," 1980; "À Lusaka," 1982; "Miliki," 1987; all from the "Lynch Fragments series" by Melvin Edwards. Cleveland Museum of Art

The pieces by Edwards, entitled “Long Term (1980),” “À Lusaka (1982),” and “Miliki (1987),” are part of a “Lynch Fragments,” an ongoing series, that the artist began in 1963.

They “encourage consideration of the violence and destruction wrought by racism in and beyond American society,” the museum said, but are not to be taken literally as depictions of narrative scenes or recognisable imagery.

Instead, the museum said, they suggest violence through welded assemblages of chains, knives, and railroad spikes that create sculptural shapes evocative of Western modernist sculpture, jazz, and traditions of African metalsmithing.