

**Student-curated exhibition | *Cultures of the Sea: Art of the Ancient Americas***

Beginning in fall 2019, seven undergraduate students worked to organize an exhibition in the Nasher Museum's Incubator Gallery through a course called the *Curatorial Practicum: Exhibition Development & Design*. Offered every two years as part of our Museum Theory & Practice concentration, this course is a unique opportunity for students to get hands-on, real world experience planning and executing an exhibition while working closely with Nasher staff. Supervised by Julia McHugh, Trent A. Carmichael Curator of Academic Initiatives, the students spent over 16 weeks selecting and researching objects in Study Storage, writing exhibition labels, and designing the exhibition's layout. Each of the seven student-curators had a unique role in the course from Project Manager to Exhibition Designer to Checklist and Labels Manager.



On February 6, *Cultures of the Sea: Art of the Ancient Americas*, opened to the public with a gallery talk attended by over 100 people. The exhibition highlights the ocean as a major practical and spiritual resource for numerous cultures across Central and South America. It features ceramics, textiles and carvings from the Nasher Museum's permanent collection. Organized thematically, these objects demonstrate the importance of the sea in ritual and burial practices, which prominently featured offerings with sea imagery and motifs, including

crabs, shells and waves. One of the goals of the exhibition was to highlight indigenous systems of value that in many ways are contradictory to our own. The theme of the exhibition emerged from an assessment of the collection that McHugh undertook last summer with two interns, who went on to be two of the student curators in the class. Many of the objects in the show have been at Duke since the early 1970s, but have rarely, if ever, been on display before. This meant that a lot of research needed to be done on individual objects, in some cases identifying what exactly they were and to which cultural groups they belong. The students made incredible discoveries and even communicated with curators and conservators at other museums.



In addition to the curatorial team of students at the Nasher, several additional groups greatly supported this project. A group of Duke undergraduates in a 400-level Computer Science course created a web application to accompany tours of the exhibition and others in the future. The app allows users to upload contextual images of artworks, for example, to help visitors better identify specific scenes or animals depicted. We also collaborated with faculty and students in the Wired Lab for Digital Art History and Visual Culture to produce high-resolution 3D models of artifacts to create immersive augmented and virtual reality access to objects that otherwise remain inaccessible behind case glass. This team is also 3D printing objects that museum visitors can touch. Additionally, we worked in collaboration with Duke Radiology to do CT scans of several of the featured objects. Those scans demonstrated the way in which

many of the pieces have intricate cavities that allowed them to function as musical instruments. One of these scans is below. In many ways, this exhibition embodies the collaborative, interdisciplinary work that is happening at the museum and across Duke's campus.



### Nasher Intern Exhibition Moves Online

Originally intended for display in the Academic Focus Gallery (gift of Susan and Trent Carmichael and the Morrow Family), the intern-curated exhibition *Dreams of Defiance: Black Feminist Fantasy and the Direct Gaze* has been moved to an online format in response to the museum closure forced by the novel coronavirus outbreak. Featuring works from the Nasher's permanent collection, *Dreams of Defiance* examines the role of "the gaze"—the power dynamics at play when the male artist is cast as active protagonist and the female body as passive subject—on black female self-portraiture. By featuring the photographs of artists like Carrie Mae Weems, LaToya Ruby Frazier, and Zanele Muholi, alongside earlier work by Edgar Degas, Henri Matisse, and Andy Warhol, this exhibition seeks to track the cultural, political, and artistic currents influencing black women artist's self-representation. Significantly, this exhibition attempts to move black women artists from the margins to the center, making a much-needed correction to the artworld today.

Ashleigh Smith, the intern responsible for organizing *Dreams of Defiance*, will be graduating this spring with a major in art history and a concentration in Museum Theory and Practice. The exhibition represents research completed by Ashleigh over two semesters enrolled in the museum practicum (ARTHIST 310 and 311), under the guidance and mentorship of Trevor Schoonmaker (Deputy Director of Curatorial Affairs and Patsy R. and Raymond D. Nasher Curator of Contemporary Art) and facilitated by Ellen C. Raimond, Assistant Curator of Academic Initiatives. The exhibition also relates to research pursued for Ashleigh's senior honors thesis titled, "A Self-Defined Sex Being: Self-Portraiture as Black Feminist Fantasy for the Purpose of Black Feminist Liberation," written under the mentorship of Dr. Jasmine Cobb, Dr. Richard J. Powell, and Dr. Adriane Lentz-Smith.



Nasher Museum interns Ashleigh Smith ('20) and Ally Perez ('20) attending the Annual Samuel DuBois Cook Society Awards Ceremony on February 11, 2020 at the Washington Duke Inn, where Smith was honored for her work promoting social equity and justice at the university through her passion for the arts.



### Music in the Galleries

The Nasher collaborated with student musicians from Duke's Music Department to host a night of student-produced music in the exhibition, *Cosmic Rhythm Vibrations*. Students composed new works, as a response to the exhibition, and perform in the galleries to an enormous crowd. The evening included a mini pop-up display of instruments from the Duke University Musical Instrument Collections. The event was organized by Ph.D. student and Academic Initiatives Graduate Teaching Assistant, Brooks Frederickson, who also hosted an interactive audio installation at the Rubenstein Arts Center.

### MUSE & Duke-student exhibition opening

Our Museum Undergraduate Student Executive (MUSE) board continues to plan popular and engaging events for Duke students. MUSE's exclusive Duke student-only opening celebration of *Ebony G. Patterson ... while the dew is still on the roses ...* on Thursday, March 5th was a resounding success! 150 students attended to enjoy performances by the Duke Amandla Chorus, Durham's own Blackspace, and Jazz@! Some guests reported "tearing up" when hearing the soulful voices of Amanda Chorus members united in song within Patterson's powerful *...while the dew is still on the roses...* exhibition. In fact, "Amandla" is a Zulu and Xhosa word that means "Power" and as a chorus, these Duke students seek to share the rich, diverse, and empowering African culture with the university community through music.

