



while Persephone is forced to return to the underworld for several months every year. In Hecker's painting, we see that she has purposely included the word "fright" near the male character, insinuating that he fears the female bodies behind him rather than desiring them.

This exhibition is meant to foster questions and discussions. By identifying colors, lines, shapes, and symbols in an artwork, viewer participation is welcomed in a time-honored art historical practice – the formal analysis. A formal analysis is based purely on facts, like "this painting is painted on canvas" or "there are six squares in the composition". Using a formal analysis, one can interpret the artwork based on knowledge of body language, symbolism, mythology, history, color theory, etc. By asking questions, identifying elements, and making correlations, one begins to think like a curator or an art historian. Studying and viewing artwork is a never-ending opportunity to learn more about oneself and about others. It is an invitation for conversations and connections!



Moisés Rodriguez, *Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs*, n.d., fired clay, PC 2017.04.321, The John Gaston Fairey Collection of Mexican Folk Art, given in memory of my parents, Isabel and Philip Fairey, who introduced me to the wonders of Mexico

Caitlin Clay is the Curator of Exhibitions at the Art Museum of Southeast Texas. She creates, organizes and installs all of the museum's exhibitions, as well as assists with collections care and management. She holds a BA in Art History with a Business Concentration from the University of Dallas and a MA in Art History from Texas Christian University. Ms. Clay grew up in Beaumont and is proud to work for a museum that was a part of her childhood memories.

*Conversations and Connections* is on view in tandem with a separate permanent collection exhibition *Summer Days: selections from the permanent collection* that comprises of paintings, drawings, sculptures, and folk art depicting how people partake in summertime activities such as visiting parks, conversing with neighbors, sunbathing, and going to the beach.

Front: Unknown Artist, *Black Shawl*, n.d., black tatted lace, PC 2017.04.130, The John Gaston Fairey Collection of Mexican Folk Art, given in memory of my parents, Isabel and Philip Fairey, who introduced me to the wonders of Mexico

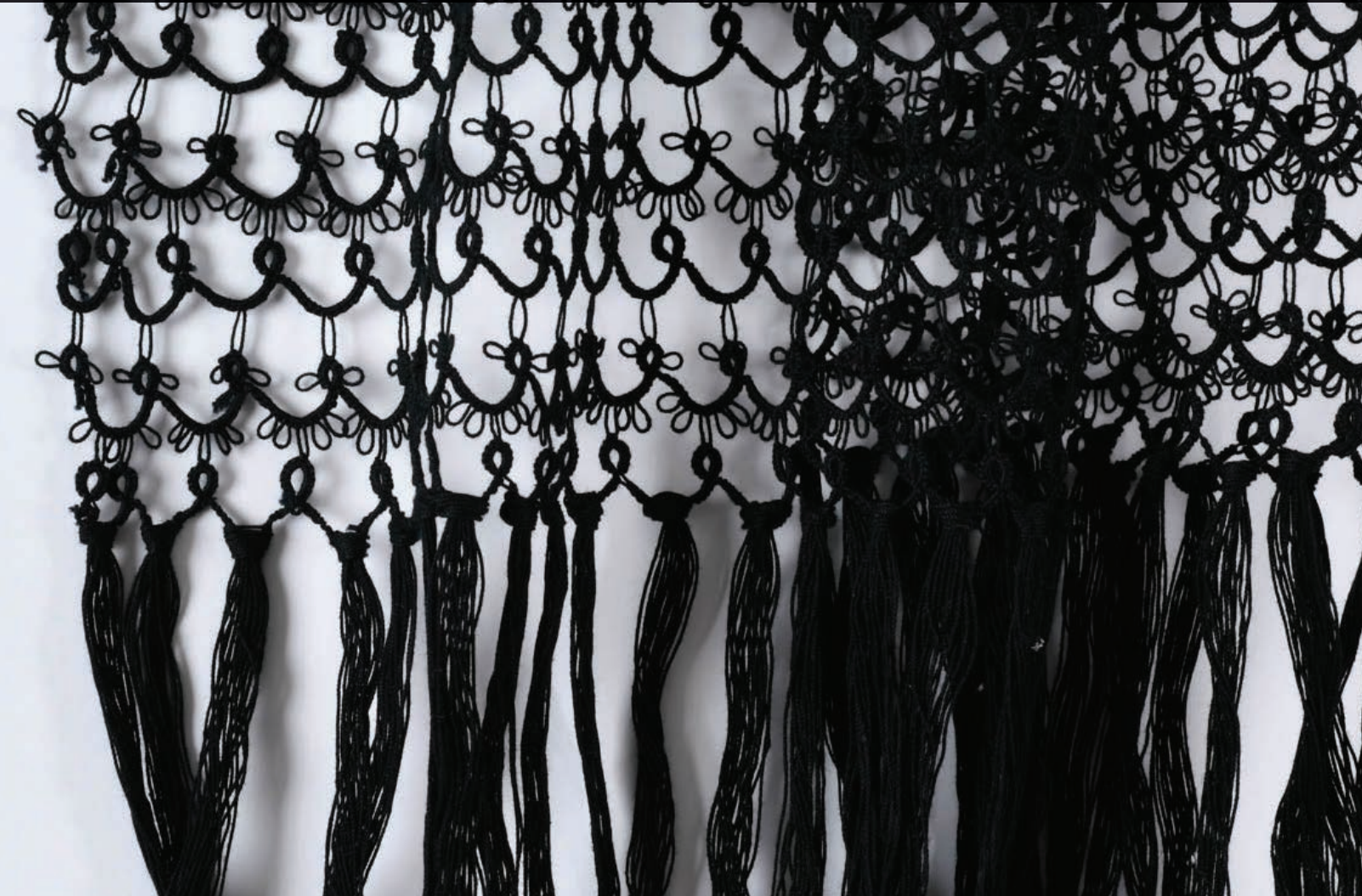
This exhibition is generously funded, in part, by the Texas Commission on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Wesley W. Washburn, M.D. And Lulu L. Smith, M.D. Endowment Fund, the C. Homer and Edith Fuller Chambers Charitable Foundation, the City of Beaumont, and the members of the Art Museum of Southeast Texas.

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Art Museum of Southeast Texas  
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Museum Hours  
Mon-Fri 9-5 Sat 10-5 Sunday 12-5  
Closed major holidays

# CONVERSATIONS & CONNECTIONS



**Art Museum of Southeast Texas**  
**July 1 - September 10, 2023**



# CONVERSATIONS & CONNECTIONS

Caitlin Clay, Curator of Exhibitions

The Art Museum of Southeast Texas (AMSET) presents the return to its annual summer tradition of exhibiting works from its permanent collection with the exhibition, *Conversations and Connections*. AMSET's permanent collection is always growing and currently includes over 1,700 objects representing over 430 artists. This show pairs artworks together and emphasizes similarities and differences in subject matter, elements of art or overall form. The exhibition includes recent acquisitions, artworks beloved by the community, and objects from collections storage that have not been viewed in several decades. AMSET's Curator of Exhibitions, Caitlin Clay, reflects on this year's exhibitions:

The idea for *Conversations and Connections* came about from visiting a local collector. We were touring the artwork he displays in his office and he mentioned pairing artworks together based on similarities in color, subject matter or material. What a great concept, particularly because it provides an opportunity to exhibit a wide variety of artworks from the permanent collection.

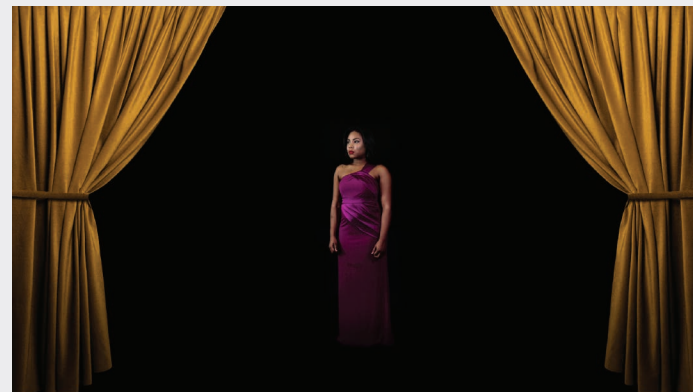
AMSET began acquiring works in 1950 when the museum was incorporated as the Beaumont Art Museum and continues to add artworks to its permanent collection through donations and museum purchases. Over the past decade, a concentrated effort has been placed on narrowing the focus of the permanent collection to assemble a cohesive but integrated body of artwork. The collection includes artworks in the following categories: Texas Contemporary Fine Art, Early Texas Art (prior to 1983), Texas Folk Art, Southeast Texas Folk Art, Early American Folk Art, Mexican Folk Art, Early American Art (prior to 1970), European Art, and Decorative Art.

Highlights of the collection include the installation of local folk artist Felix "Fox" Harris' totems, made from recycled materials, and the 2017 acquisition of the John G. Fairey Collection of Mexican Folk Art, which numbers over 470 objects.

Curating an exhibition is no easy feat, as there are many factors to consider including the elements of art (composition, line, shape and form, space, color and texture), as well as the principles of art and design (balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, pattern, rhythm, and unity/variety). Other factors



Paul Manes, *Untitled (For Peggy)*, n.d., monoprint, PC 2006.01, Gift of Dr. Joseph Carlucci in loving memory of his wife, Peggy Wilson Carlucci



Prince Thomas, *America the Beautiful* (video still), 2019, single channel 1080p video with stereo and binaural audio, PC 2019.09, Gift of the artist

at Lamar University, with a specialization in photography and digital media. His work invites viewers to engage with issues of race, class, politics, and identity in contemporary society. Paul Manes is a White male painter, an alumnus of Lamar University and has had an extensive career exhibiting all over the world. His work is often large-scale and includes art historical references. Charles Criner is a Black artist well-known for his work as the Advertising Director for the Houston Post (a now defunct newspaper) and his work with the the Houston Chronicle. He is a talented printmaker specializing in lithographs. All three artists have extensive studies in art school and exhibited throughout the United States and abroad. Their three artworks are made of different materials, but have similar symbols and broadly address the topics of immigration and politics from three different perspectives.

Another grouping is Ellen Tanner's painting *Persephone and Hades* (2017) and Winslow Homer's wood engraving *St. Valentine's Day* (1868). Winslow Homer was a White male landscape painter and illustrator, well-known for his depictions of marine subjects. Ellen Tanner is a White female painter who specializes in finely detailed, miniature paintings focusing on animals and mythology. In Homer's engraving, we see a young couple reading together about the stories of various legendary and mythological couples. In Tanner's painting, we specifically see the mythological figures Persephone and Hades. When comparing these two works, we can consider how love, lust, passion and romance have shaped our understanding of relationships. We can also consider how these stories are told from different perspectives. This theme is carried over into the interpretation of Moisés Rodríguez's Mexican folk art vessel, *Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs* (circa 20th or 21st century), where the Centaurs are attempting to forcibly abduct the Lapith women, and Rachel Hecker's painting, *Pleasure and Commerce* (1994), where female bodies are being ogled by a male character. Unlike Persephone, the Lapiths are able to triumph over their would-be abductors and are able to escape,

include artist's biographies, medium (what is the artwork made from), and time period. Curating an exhibition can be equated with detective work with a focus on how history, culture and symbolism can connect to tell a story or share a perspective about an individual, a collective group or a shared experience of all humankind.

A favorite grouping in this exhibition includes Prince Thomas' video, *America the Beautiful* (2019), installed near Paul Manes' painting, *Send Us Your Poor* (1988), and Charles Criner's lithograph, *An Obama Momma* (2008). Prince Thomas is an Indian-American male interdisciplinary artist and currently a Professor of Art



Ellen Tanner, *Persephone and Hades*, 2017, oil on panel, PC 2018.01, museum purchase