

UMMA

University of Michigan
Museum of Art

You Are Here

On March 16, 2020, the UMMA closed shortly after the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 to be a global pandemic. The museum announced its reopening after 448 days on June 17, 2021.

Excited and eager about its reopening, the UMMA wanted to show an exhibit that encapsulated the feeling of the time it closed. The exhibit is called "You Are Here" and features five paintings and a sounding sculpture. The pieces in this exhibit were specifically chosen to remind visitors to be truly present and immerse themselves in the artwork. Throughout the pandemic, connecting with one another virtually was the new normal, and many of us lost touch with reality. The exhibit is a reminder to stay grounded and be conscious of your environment: where you are and where you aren't.

Following the theme of consciousness, trying to make meaning of what an artist is trying to convey can be intimidating and leave people confused. In order to make the most out of trips to museums like the UMMA, consider researching the background of the exhibit, the artist and what they chose to make because it leads to a better understanding of it all which makes it all more a meaningful and mesmerizing experience. That's what I tried to accomplish, with the mindset that anyone can enjoy art and discover different meanings.

BY RUTH SHIKANOV

"Oh, Honey..."

A new exhibit called "Oh, Honey..." premiered in Aug. 2021 and features works that Sean Kramer, the Irving Stenn, Jr Curatorial fellow, felt like they challenged how he thought when trying to figure out what "queer art" is. Being a queer man himself as well as a graduate student and art historian at the University of Michigan, he wondered how he could portray his message -- art that allow us to question the categories of gender, power and the sexuality dynamics that operate within them -- in different pieces of art, how they are arranged physically and encourage us come up with our own understandings. Overall, Kramer creates an environment discussing and showing topics differing from AIDS, sexuality and gender, intimacy and so much more.





Around the World in Blue and White

“Around The World in Blue and White” is an exhibit that made its debut in Dec. 2021 and consists of beautiful, unique pieces from all over the world. Blue and white porcelain was first made in China during the 14th century by Muslim merchants. The style quickly spread and was found in homes across East and Southeast Asia, the Middle East, the eastern coast of the African continent and eventually, Europe and North and South America. The exhibit features pieces varying from a ceramic tiger pillow to ceramic plates.

An image of Bruce Lee is composed of small, circular plates and is surrounded by dragon and flower-scroll designs. The piece is called “Icon” and is made by Ste-

ven Young Lee, an American ceramic artist who questions the history and symbolic meaning behind blue and white ceramics. The distance between the plates implies the distance between Asians and Americans, and how they are seen in an American consciousness. This piece is personal to Lee, given the fact that he grew up as a second-generation Asian American. Bruce Lee was a significant and fundamental figure in the lives of young boys. Many of the images of Bruce Lee we see today are sensationalized and sometimes campy versions of who he was and what he meant to our culture. “This is simply a portrait of an individual who became an icon,” Lee said in the exhibit label.

Behind The Walls

“Behind The Walls” was previously installed at Rockefeller Plaza in New York City, but relocated to Ann Arbor as a gift in November 2020. Made by Spanish artist Jaume Plensa, the statue symbolizes a teenage girl covering her eyes. While all art is subjective, this piece can be interpreted in a multitude of ways; is she shielding her eyes from the world and encouraging us to stop covering our eyes and to see what surrounds us? This sculpture is a part of a series about the “likenesses of young women” (UMMA) and who is paid attention to compared to who is not in art.

“Sometimes, our hands are the biggest walls,” Jaume Plensa said. “They can cover our eyes, and we can blind ourselves to so much of what’s happening around us.”



Sophie/Elsie

When you first enter the room, a life size mannequin wearing a blue and white uniform captures your eye. The mannequin is positioned in the middle of the room and is in front of a bright red wall curating a stark contrast between the two. The piece is called Sophie/Elsie and is part of a series in which Mary Sibande, a South African artist, explores and learns more about her family history. Three generations of the Sibande women were domestic workers in Apartheid South Africa and while Sibande was born after Nelson Mandela’s presidency started, she could imagine the dreams her ancestors envisioned. These dreams are carried out by her alter ego, Sophie, the mannequin. Sibande created this piece in honor of her great-grandmother, named Elsie, because her masters couldn’t be bothered to learn her African name. The mannequin’s eyes are shut to symbolize that Sophie is envisioning herself as a businesswoman, an orchestra conductor and a superhero. Her maid dress transforms into a dress that a Victorian queen would wear which is complete with a large cape and long train.