



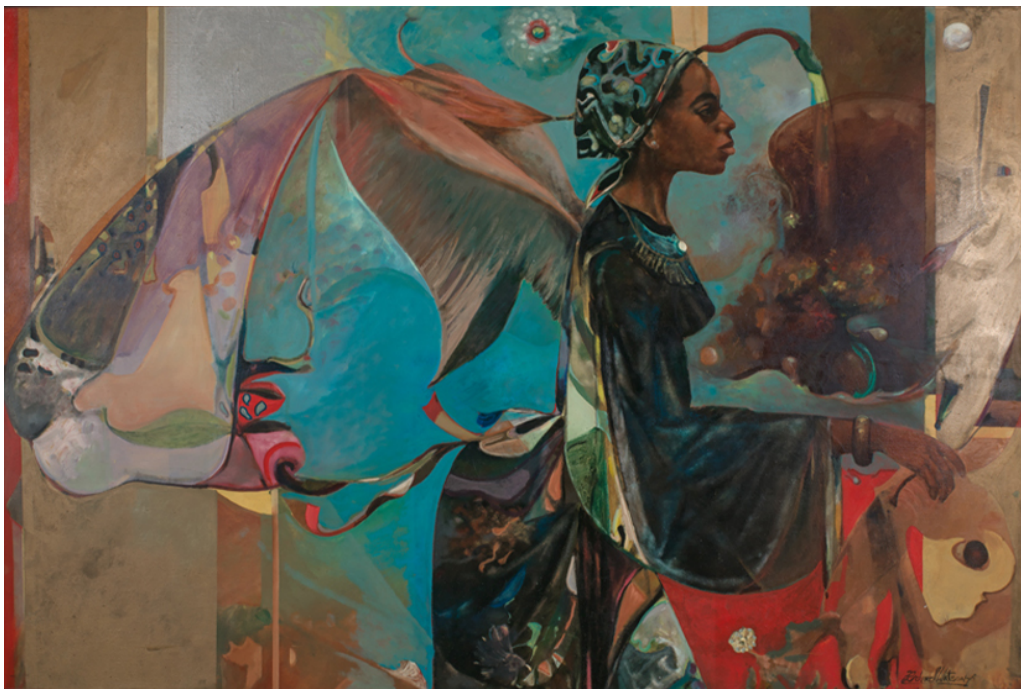
## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Media contact:** Tiffany Bradley

Associate Director of Communications | [tbradley@smith.edu](mailto:tbradley@smith.edu)

### **SCMA CELEBRATES A BEACON TO THE WORLD: ART FROM THE SYLVIA SMITH LEWIS '74 AND BYRON E. LEWIS SR. COLLECTION**

*Exhibition unveils works of Black artists donated by Sylvia Smith Lewis '74 and Byron E. Lewis Sr.*



**April 16, 2024, Northampton, MA** – Smith College Museum of Art (SCMA) presents the exhibition *A Beacon to the World: Art from the Sylvia Smith Lewis '74 and Byron E. Lewis Sr. Collection* from February 23 to September 22, 2024. *A Beacon to the World* showcases the generous donation of artwork to SCMA by the Lewis family. Visitors can view more than twenty works by Richmond Barthé, Romare Bearden, Betty Blayton-Taylor, Fred Brown and Richard J. Watson. This exhibition was supported by the Suzannah J. Fabing Programs Fund.

Sylvia Smith Lewis '74 and Byron E. Lewis Sr. are prominent collectors of and advocates for Black artists. "I chose to donate our art to Smith because the campus museum has done tremendous reparative work, as have other major museums, to include African American, Caribbean and African art, which is our primary collection," says Smith alumna Sylvia Smith Lewis '74. She adds "When all is said and done about African Americans and our complicated history, it will be our art that will bring about understanding and positive change."

The Lewises' remarkable collection grew alongside their long-standing personal connections with and promotion of Black artists. At times when these artists could not find representation in the art market, Byron opened the walls of his corporate offices as a de facto gallery where artists could display their work and bring in potential buyers. Currently on display at SCMA is a portrait, *Byron Lewis*, by Fred Brown, whose works are widely displayed in museums such as the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Sylvia Smith Lewis '74 is an independent art consultant, collector and archivist specializing in public art and 20th-century American art, especially work by African American artists. She is the founder and CEO of Narrative Network, which amplifies the art and voices of diverse women and communities through publishing and events. She also serves as director of the New York Auntyland Film Festival, which highlights short films by diverse women, especially filmmakers over the age of 50.

Byron Lewis was dubbed "The Original Black Media King" in a 2021 profile in the *New York Times*. He founded and ran the pioneering advertising firm UniWorld, which championed multicultural advertising and promoted the interests of Black and Latino/Latinx consumers, creating campaigns for clients such as Mars Inc., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, AT&T, Stax Records, Avon and many others. His office materials and business archives are on display in the *American Enterprise* exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

“Smith is deeply grateful to Sylvia and Byron Lewis for this remarkable gift,” says Smith College president Sarah Willie-LeBreton. “The museum of art is among the college’s most valued resources for teaching, for research and for the enjoyment of our students, faculty and staff, as well as the surrounding community. Its collection is both broad and deep. The gift of these works adds yet more strength in an area that the museum is dedicated to expanding. Smith welcomes visitors from all over the world to see the Lewis Collection. It has been a pleasure and an honor for me personally to get to know Sylvia and to share her joy in the work of these great artists.”

Jessica Nicoll, director and chief curator of SCMA, notes, “The Smith College Museum of Art is committed to diversifying its collection, with particular attention to acquiring work by artists of color in all periods and media. This transformative gift from Sylvia and Byron Lewis both deepens and expands SCMA’s representation of work by artists of African descent. Valuably, it also tells the story of visionary and activist collectors.”

Beverly Morgan-Welch '74, senior deputy director of external affairs for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, serves on both the Smith College Board of Trustees and the SCMA Visiting Committee. She also is a fellow member of Smith’s class of 1974, along with Sylvia Lewis. Morgan-Welch says, “At this time, cultural institutions are seeking to include women and BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color] artists in their collections and exhibitions. Sylvia, always an advocate for Smith and Black artists, has stepped forward to help elevate these artists and SCMA’s collection. She is strategic and generous beyond measure by gifting to Smith the spectacular collection she and Byron have lovingly built over their lives. In choosing Smith as the repository for these works, she has affirmed the college’s dedication to the recognition of these artists . . . ensuring that generations of Smith students, faculty and visitors will be exposed to their work, to learn and be inspired.”

“I am a proud member of the class of 1974, the largest class of Black women in Smith's history,” Sylvia said. “We improved Smith through diversity and campus activism.” She and fellow leaders were instrumental in founding the Africana

Studies program, the Black Student Alliance and the Emergency Fund for Students of Color. Sylvia has hosted numerous Smith College alumnae gatherings at her home in New York City, including a celebration of *Meridians*, Smith's peer-reviewed journal of feminism, race and transnationalism.

The timing of the exhibition *A Beacon to the World* will allow Sylvia and her classmates to view these works during their 50th Reunion at Smith College this spring.

# # #

## **ABOUT SCMA**

As a teaching museum affiliated with Smith College, SCMA is dedicated to connecting people to art, ideas and each other by engaging people with firsthand experiences of art, artists and museum practice; collecting, researching, presenting and preserving an expansive collection of art in the service of learning, teaching and critical dialogue; and by fostering an inclusive and accessible environment that welcomes diverse perspectives and inspires imagination.

SCMA and the Museum Shop are open to the public year-round Tuesday–Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. In SCMA's galleries and classrooms, visitors experience a world-class collection of art spanning ancient times to the present and encompassing the arts of Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe. The Cunningham Center for the Study of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs houses and hosts the study of a comprehensive collection of works on paper.

In November 2023, SCMA was awarded support from Art Bridges Foundation through its new "Access for All" grant initiative. Joining a generous gift from Smith College alumnae Jan Fullgraf Golann '71 and Jane Timken '64 that enabled the museum to eliminate all admission fees, this funding will be used to provide further access to art through a wide range of initiatives. SCMA will invest in access and audience development with extended hours, innovative programming and student outreach.

An accredited member of the American Alliance of Museums and a founding member of Museums10, a regional cultural collaboration, SCMA is also a member of the College Art Association and the New England Museum Association.

Image: Richard J. Watson. American, born 1946. *Maxine*, 1976. Oil on canvas. Gift of Sylvia Smith Lewis, class of 1974, and Byron E. Lewis Sr.

Smith College Museum of Art  
20 Elm Street at Bedford Terrace  
Northampton, MA 01063  
Tiffany Bradley  
[tbradley@smith.edu](mailto:tbradley@smith.edu)

#30#