



NEWS RELEASE

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Toledo Museum of Art exhibition to feature work of Alison Saar

Artist explores race, gender identity, and spirituality in African American culture

TOLEDO, Ohio – A compelling and powerful exhibition featuring the work of contemporary artist Alison Saar, who addresses issues pertaining to race, gender and the vulnerability of the human body, will open April 4, 2020, in the New Media Gallery.

Mirror, Mirror: The Prints of Alison Saar will run through July 5, 2020, and includes more than 30 prints and six sculptures from her 35-year career. The works come from the collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and his Family Foundation and the Toledo Museum of Art.

Saar's longtime engagement with the mining of historical, mythological and literary references to reimagine identity has become a source of inspiration for many of today's artists, explained TMA's senior works on paper curator, Dr. Robin Reisenfeld, who organized the exhibition.

"Alison Saar's work resonates because she works with materials in an inventive but accessible way," Reisenfeld said. "Her unorthodox approach, where she will print an image on linen sackseed (*Breach*, 2017) or on a vintage cotton handkerchief (*High Yella' Blue*, 2016) instead of traditional paper, provides a tangibility and immediacy to the imagined events she depicts." Both of these works indicate her emphasis on mixed-media materials to communicate ideas and emotions.

Like Saar's sculptures that often incorporate found objects, the artist's innovative prints center upon a strong single female figure portrayed in a manner reminiscent of woodcarvings of African deities and address racial identity and related issues of gender, heritage and spirituality. Saar's unconventional graphic style combines historical printmaking methods and cultural narratives—including African art and ritual, Greek mythology and German Expressionism—overlaid with personal memories and experiences.

"While she often works with similar subject matter and themes, it is interesting to see how she translates those concepts from one material to the next," Reisenfeld said. "She breaks out of the traditional printmaking mold to reference her own ancestry and heritage."

Saar, a biracial artist, creates work that is both personal and universal, Reisenfeld said. Her rich artistic practice across media challenges cultural and historic references and stereotypes.

In *High Yella' Blue*, an intaglio and pochoir print on a handkerchief, Saar depicts a woman's face with brown and white tones, visually making the connection to the title's mixed race reference. "High yellow" was a term coined during the time of slavery that described light-skinned individuals who shared African and European ancestry, but who were nevertheless classified as black.

"In this piece Saar creates an 'everywoman' generic face with tears running down her cheeks to indicate that grief is a commonly shared emotion," Reisenfeld said. "The blank eyes and pronounced tears create an otherworldly and stoic expression that correlates with Saar's interest in spiritual representation."

Mirror, Mirror: The Prints of Alison Saar is sponsored by 2020 Exhibition Program Sponsor ProMedica with additional support from the Ohio Arts Council.

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The Toledo Museum of Art

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Admission to the Museum is free. The Museum is open Tuesday and Wednesday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, Noon to 5 p.m.; and is closed Monday and major holidays. Thursday evening hours are sponsored by Huntington Private Client Group.

The Museum is located at 2445 Monroe Street at Scottwood Avenue, just west of the downtown business district and one block off I-75 with exit designations posted. For general information, visitors can call 419-255-8000 or 800-644-6862, or visit toledomuseum.org.