Egyptian, Roman Period, *Portrait of a Woman*, tempera on linden wood panel, about 50 CE
1971.130

Painting—on walls, linen hangings, and wood panels—was a prized art form in ancient Greece and Rome, but few examples survive. In Egypt, however, paintings have sometimes been preserved in dry desert tombs, such as this naturalistic portrait of a candid, plump, and middle-aged woman dressed in her best. Greeks and Romans who lived in Egypt after it became a Roman province adapted the ancient Egyptian custom of mummy portraits. The textured lower edge may indicate where a frame was removed when this family portrait was inserted in mummy wrappings. The earliest Roman mummy portraits were painted about 50 CE, but the practice ended in 392 when the Christian emperor Theodosius outlawed mummification.
Joos de Momper the Younger (Flemish, 1564–1635) and Jan Brueghel the Elder (Flemish, 1568–1625), *A Summer Landscape with Harvesters*, oil on canvas, about 1610

In a glorious, earthy depiction of humanity and nature, peasants labor in the fields, relax with a picnic, and flirt in a vast, panoramic landscape of rolling fields that give way to a distant valley and ultimately the faraway sea. Possibly part of a series of paintings showing labors appropriate to the different months or seasons, *A Summer Landscape with Harvesters* is the largest and most spectacular of Joos de Momper’s many harvest scenes.

Based on a similar composition by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York), the painting is a collaboration between De Momper and Pieter Bruegel’s son, Jan Brueghel. De Momper, who was one of the most prominent Flemish landscape painters of the late 1500s and early 1600s, often worked with other painters who would add figures, animals, and birds to his landscapes. Jan Brueghel was a frequent collaborator with Peter Paul Rubens and a successful artist in his own right.
Rachel Ruysch (Dutch, 1664–1750), *Flower Still Life*, oil on canvas, about 1726

1956.57

Against a dark background, in the style of flower painting from the second half of the seventeenth century, Rachel Ruysch composed a lush floral arrangement, including many flowers that would never actually bloom at the same time. Among this array of blossoming and wilting plants, a closer look reveals caterpillars crawling along the stem of a flower and browning leaves riddled with holes made by hungry insects. Such vivid details suggest the fragility of the arrangement, even alluding to the fact that beauty fades and all living things must die.

Ruysch was the daughter of a professor of anatomy and botany, and likely became familiar with plants through him. By age fifteen she was studying with the still-life artist Willem van Aelst. From this background of scientific and artistic studies, she learned to capture the essence of nature in her own flower paintings. The most famous female painter in the Golden Age of Dutch art, Ruysch enjoyed an international reputation over a career that lasted almost seven decades.
Jean-Siméon Chardin (French, 1699–1779), *The Washerwoman*, oil on canvas, about 1733–39
2006.3

In *The Washerwoman* the title figure scrubs laundry in a large wooden wash bucket. Jean-Siméon Chardin paints her gazing away from her work, as if something has distracted her attention—or as if she is captured in a moment of musing, suggesting her inner life beyond the drudgery of her occupation. The composition, with its focus on a domestic interior and the effects of light on a variety of surfaces, owes much to 17th-century Dutch paintings.

The skillfully contrived “simplicity” of Chardin's quiet images, along with his mastery of rendering the appearance of things—fabric, ceramic, wood, fur, skin, liquid—provoke the desire to linger in the presence of his paintings.
1926.63

Venice is radiant, if somewhat shabby, in Joseph Mallord William Turner’s view north across the Venetian Lagoon. The city is to the left and the cemetery island of San Michele (the Campo Santo of the title) is on the right. Lacking impressive monuments, this unimposing locale was not often depicted. For Turner the cemetery, a fairly recent addition to Venice, may have stood as a fitting symbol of the slow demise in the 19th century of this once powerful imperial city. Suggestions of decline may be intended by the floating debris and the lowly (though picturesque) boats in the foreground.

In the luminous colors and soft, fluid brushwork, solid forms are fused with their reflections and absorbed into light. Venice appears shimmering and ethereal. As fellow British painter John Constable remarked of Turner, “He seems to paint with tinted steam, so evanescent and so airy.”
Thornton Dial, Jr. composes assemblages, furniture, sculpture, and paintings that explore consistent themes of nature, the working man, and African American experiences. He painted the autobiographical *Home Sweet Home* the week he left his job at the Pullman Standard Company in Bessemer, Alabama, which built railway cars.

Dial, Jr. often employs humor and satire to explore pertinent themes, and this work has a certain lightness. He paints himself as a smiling frog, walking into a vividly hued swamp. The frog appears to be gleefully returning home, as Dial Jr. did to dedicate more time to his art and his community.
Julie Macdonald (American, 1926–1982), *Head of Charlie Parker*

Prolific artist, collector, and civil rights champion Julie Macdonald likely met saxophonist Charlie “Bird” Parker (1920–1955)—one of the most groundbreaking and influential jazz soloists in history—during his 1952 trip to California. They became close friends, most probably more, sharing a love of art, poetry, and music. Parker’s friend and biographer Robert Reisner wrote, “Charlie Parker, in the brief span of his life, crowded more living into it than any other human being.” He also lived hard, especially after the death of his young daughter in 1954, which deepened his struggles with addiction and mental illness. He died a year later at the age of 35. Macdonald sculpted *Head of Charlie Parker* soon after his untimely death.

Rather than smiling or playing the saxophone as in most published photographs, here Parker seems more muted and pensive. His eyes are open, but they are undefined, suggesting introspection. Despite the celebrity of her subject, Macdonald presents a version of Parker that one only saw outside of public scrutiny. As she wrote in a tribute, “Bird’s memory was uncanny. With that combination of perception and memory he translated experience through the horn. He caught the pulse of our times, the pressure, confusion, and complexity, and more; sadness, sweetness, and love.”
April Surgent (American, born 1982), *Sea Ice Moves in Spring—Arthur Harbor, Western Antarctic Peninsula*  
2016.1a–c

April Surgent translates her own photographs into fused glass panels using the ancient technique of cameo carving. She carves back the top layer of glass to reveal the layers of color beneath to create an image. Surgent’s fascination with the dialogue between art and science has led her to a focus on human impact on vulnerable ecosystems. The photograph of the floating sea ice that served as the basis for this work was taken during Surgent’s residency sponsored by the American Science Foundation at the Palmer Station in Antarctica.

Her atmospheric triptych captures the layered translucency of snow-covered fields of ice floating in a blue-black sea. The perspective also makes it feel as if viewers are visually wading in these frigid waters.

*Trolldom Teku Maku Maya Kon* synthesizes cultures, times, and decorative themes into a single artwork that is as fantastical as the nonsense phrase of its name. Known for her intricately sculpted white porcelain objects, Katsuyo Aoki collaborated on its creation with her partner, Shinichiro Kitaura, a painter. Bringing the exuberant organic forms of 18th-century Rococo ornament into the 21st century, Aoki pairs this distinctive visual language with porcelain, a material notorious for its extreme difficulty and delicacy. The cobalt underglaze found in the central tiles employs the blue and white porcelain tradition that historically dominated East Asian ceramics, while also evoking those from early modern Europe, including Dutch Delftware like the two covered vases flanking this gallery’s entrance.

Eleven-and-a-half feet high and more than 7 feet wide, this imposing yet fragile object commands viewers’ attention and self-reflection. Its form recalls an elaborately carved mirror, but rather than glass at the center, we find a visual cacophony of birds, butterflies, flowers, and, buried within, a skull—a motif found throughout Aoki’s work. Juxtaposing vibrating life with a reminder of human mortality, the work prompts contemplation on the fleeting nature of life.
Beverly Fishman (American, born 1955), Night Kandyland, acrylic, spray, and enamel paint on polished stainless steel, 2009
2009.390a–b

Beverly Fishman’s art explores the links between humanity, physical and mental health, and the medical industry. *Night Kandyland* seemingly pulses with neon color in patterns composed of EEG (electroencephalogram) and EKG (electrocardiogram) readings of brainwaves and heartbeats along with pharmaceutical pill designs. Fishman explains, “This mostly appropriated imagery is chosen to get the viewer to think about the ways in which science and technology represent the human body and its processes today, as well as how the pharmaceutical industry sells us the promise of changing our mental and physical states through chemistry. These associations, I hope, help to guide the viewer’s experience of the formal aspects of the paintings, which use repeating patterns and contrasting and harmonizing colors to evoke a rhythmic and flickering experience of sensory overload.”

With the mirror-like surface of her painting on panels of polished steel, Fishman invites the viewer to see themselves and their environment reflected in what she describes as “a technological space of medical imaging technologies, computer-driven manipulation processes, and chemical panaceas.”