

## HUCKLEBERRY FINN

Lower and Upper Galleries

September 28, 2010 to December 11, 2010

*Huckleberry Finn* is the third show in a trilogy of Wattis Institute exhibitions that are based on canonical American novels. In 2008, *The Wizard of Oz* revealed layers of political symbolism and escapism, while in 2009, *Moby-Dick* delved into the seemingly futile struggle between good and evil. In 2010, *Huckleberry Finn* will look at Mark Twain's investigation of racial tensions in America through an international lens. All three stories have major themes related to exploration and (self)discovery, and the corresponding exhibitions function as metaphorical journeys through which the audience experiences various notions of America's reality, both contemporary and historic. Established and emerging contemporary artists from around the world are invited to address the key themes of the books and the historical moments in which they were written. Many of the artists create new commissions specifically for the shows.

This investigation of America and its realities through the lens of literature by means of artworks, artifacts, and historical documents is unique to the Wattis Institute. *Huckleberry Finn* will encompass a wide range of works, including painting, sculpture, film, video, drawing, and photography.

Artists include:

Edgar Arceneaux

Ruth-Marion Baruch

Romare Bearden

Elizabeth Catlett

Claude Clark

Abraham Cruzvillegas

Jamal Cyrus

Emory Douglas

Geoffrey Farmer

Simon Fujiwara

Ellen Gallagher

Felix Gonzalez-Torres

Rodney Graham

David Hammons  
Clementine Hunter  
Edward W. Kemble  
Dorothea Lange  
Tim Lee  
Henry Lewis  
Glenn Ligon  
Pare Lorentz  
Jason Meadows  
Kristen Morgin  
Thomas Nast  
Kirsten Pieroth  
Horace Pippin  
Betye Saar  
Yinka Shonibare MBE  
Allison Smith  
Alec Soth  
William Desmond Taylor  
Hank Willis Thomas  
Kara Walker  
Andy Warhol

Through the lens of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, this exhibition addresses issues of racism, the violent history of slavery, and struggles for equality. The first floor provides an introduction to the novel through ephemera such as first editions, reviews from the book's initial publication, photographs of Mark Twain, and the 1920s silent film adaptation. Historical artifacts and artworks generate a portrait of the American South and African-American life under slavery. The second floor is entirely devoted to newly commissioned and contemporary artwork that reflects upon themes from the book. The resulting narrative provides viewers with a sense of the book's history, a portrait of the time it was written, and contemporary reflections on the controversial work.

2010 marks the 125th anniversary of the first publishing of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the 100th anniversary of Mark Twain's passing. Since 1885 when the novel was first released, it has been consistently censored in libraries and schools for its repeated use of racial slurs and its arguably ambiguous depiction of Jim, an African-American slave. While it is counted as one of the most important works of American literature, it still tops the banned book list in America, revealing that its underlying issues of intolerance, racism, and struggles for equality are not things of the past,

but still vividly alive in our society. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is not a relic, but a living reminder of the problems of racism that still riddle our society.

*The Wizard of Oz*, *Moby-Dick* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* all conjure up romantic nostalgia for the American dream, where freedom and adventure perpetually lie on the horizon. Taken at face value, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* chronicles the epic adventure of a boy Huck and his loyal friend Jim as they raft down the Mississippi river. They meet rascallions, narrowly dodge family feuds, and deepen their burgeoning friendship, all while helping Jim reach freedom. Looking further into the narrative, it is a portrait of the time and an intimate look at a young boy's self-education. While many have charged Twain with racism because of his repeated use of racial slurs in the novel, this reading is an oversimplification. Though slavery had been abolished when *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was published, Jim Crow laws were an ongoing and violent form of oppression. Twain's portrait of the South in the 1830s details the hypocrisy of racism that continued through his time and ours.

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