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YCBA reinstallation puts British art in global context



VEENA MCCOOLE | 2:04 AM, SEP 14, 2016
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Following its spring 2016 reopening, the Yale Center for British Art has reinstalled its permanent collection, presenting British art in a global context and renewing its commitment to teaching.

The reinstallation of the center’s permanent holdings, “Britain and the World,” occupies the museum’s second and fourth floors, presenting works chronologically with thematic sections interspersed throughout. Gillian Forrester, senior curator of prints and drawings, emphasized the “internationalism” of the collection — an aspect that the new installation seeks to highlight — as well as donor Paul Mellon’s ‘29 original vision of the Center as an institution that would showcase British art in light of the broader political and cultural life of Britain’s global empire.

“Rather than to segregate British artists and the more transnational objects, we’ve tried to integrate them and suggest that it’s all part of the story,” Forrester said. “We wanted to take the ‘Britain and the World’ message as the key theme, because our collections do have such global reach. They’re not about a ‘Little England.’”

Matthew Hargraves, YCBA chief curator of art collections and a member of the team that conceptualized the reinstallation, emphasized the new installation’s attempt to explore more fully the relationship between Britain’s art and imperial ambitions.

By introducing post-colonial pieces into the YCBA’s main galleries and highlighting the work of artists born outside of the British Isles, Hargraves added, the reinstallation showcases the diversity of British art.

“I hope people will visit and discover ... that far from being insular,

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British art has an extraordinary range and breadth, that it was shaped by artists from across the globe, and that it was constantly being reinvented in response to Britain’s changing fortune,” Hargraves noted.

As well as offering visitors a glimpse of British art’s global nature, the reinstallation seeks to reaffirm the YCBA’s commitment to serving as an academic resource for the University community, Forrester said. She highlighted the “fluidity” of the center’s exhibition spaces, and the frequency with which its offerings are rotated in response to faculty requests.

In step with Mellon’s desire that the collection be “at the service of scholars and students,” Hargraves added, the reinstalled collection is complemented by new teaching spaces and programs. An additional seminar room, designed to house the growing number of seminars and classes taking place in the YCBA, overlooks the freshly installed “Long Gallery,” Forrester said.

“Paul Mellon placed his collection of British art at Yale precisely so that it could be at the service of scholars and students,” Hargraves explained. “We continue to benefit from his foresight through the engagement of faculty and students from a host of schools, departments and disciplines at the University.”

Students from various departments expressed excitement about the new academic opportunities that the center’s reinstalled collection and renovated spaces offer. Mollie Ritterband ‘17, a history major, and Gretchen Tarrant ‘17, who studies political science, mentioned their interest in the reinstallation’s global emphasis, citing its relevance to fields of study beyond art history.

The Yale Center for British Art is located at 1080 Chapel St.

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