



EXHIBITS NEWSLINE

Have you seen an interesting new exhibition lately – something that touched you, made you laugh, or moved you to action? Consider writing about it for Exhibits Newsline! Entries should be brief (300 words max), breezy (tell what made it so great), and include three to four high-res images.

For more information, email: NAMENewsline@gmail.com.

Fig. 1.

Pavilion exhibit featuring individual artworks in a combined installation.



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Subtle Intimacy: Here and There Combines Light and Darkness in a Unique Display

PORTLAND JAPANESE GARDEN

Portland, Oregon

In 2022, the Portland Japanese Garden established the Japan Institute to preserve and teach traditional Japanese arts and promote and support emerging talent. The Institute’s first artist-in-residence, Japanese glass and metal artist Rui Sasaki, created work that culminated in the exhibition *Subtle Intimacy: Here and There*. The exhibition spread over three areas of the garden. The artist inserted a glass installation on a hillside between trees and placed a metal sculpture in the Garden’s traditional tea house. However, the large installation in the Garden’s Pavilion, featuring glass artworks of pressed plant-specimen cuttings from the Portland Japanese Garden and the artist’s home in Japan was what compelled me to visit the show (fig. 1).

Fig. 2.

Close-up of an individual glass panel.

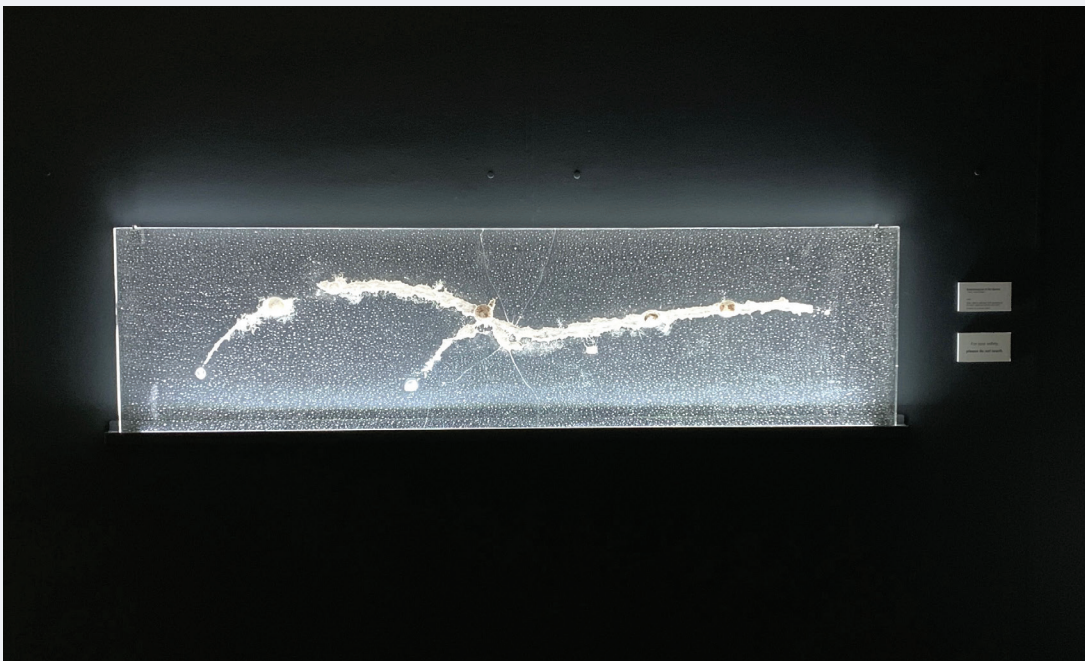


I didn't mind standing in line to enter the Pavilion because limiting the number of visitors allowed for a closer, more intimate experience. I particularly appreciated being able to walk through the center of the box-like installation to view the individual glass artworks from both sides (fig. 2). The modular exhibit incorporated a series of rails with hidden LED lights that illuminated the glass panels from above and below. One artwork had a custom mount and was lit from the base giving the illusion that the artwork glowed from within (fig. 3). I'd never experienced a lighting scheme like this. I also enjoyed how visitors could view this exhibit as numerous individual artworks or as one large art installation. After viewing the glass artworks in the Pavilion, I felt that the two garden installations lacked tension and engagement, perhaps because they were placed away from pathways and could only be viewed from a distance. Within the Pavilion, however, the darkened interior, controlled viewing environment, and vivid lighting effects created a sense of intimacy and drama that transformed time spent viewing artwork into time experiencing art.

Jennifer Gritt, Independent Museum Professional

Fig. 3.

Larger artwork individually displayed on a custom panel base and illuminated from the bottom.



A Challenge to the Classic Period Room Trope Asks Powerful Questions about the Past, Present, and Future

Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART,
GALLERY 508
New York, New York



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Fig. 1. The view into this domestic space answers the question: What might New York's Seneca Village look like now if it had not been destroyed, and if the free Black residents had lived in comfort and security?

Here, at a vital intersection at the heart of the Museum, this project opens a space for yet more histories to be told that look toward a more resilient future.

—Exhibition Overview

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has dozens of period rooms in the American Wing spanning the late 17th century through the turn of the 20th century. These spaces immerse visitors in a different time and place, offering them a glimpse into a dimly lit domestic interior, usually that of an affluent white family. *Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room* not only sets itself apart from this traditional approach, it affords for the creation of something entirely new and breathtaking. I found the curation so poignant and moving it's changed the way I think about period rooms entirely. Hannah Beachler, the Oscar-winning Production Designer for the *Black Panther* films, worked with the Met's curatorial team to pose the question: What might New York's Seneca Village look like now if it had

Fig. 2. The living room and library features a hand-blown glass chandelier that fuses centuries-old craft with modern design.



not been destroyed, and if the free Black residents had lived in comfort and security? The exhibition answers that question with a view into that alternate reality.

Upon first glance, *Before Yesterday We Could Fly* stood out among the adjacent period rooms because it seemed too contemporary, too colorful, and too joyful (fig. 1). The exhibition abandons the dim conservation lighting and beige pallor of its neighbors. Like all period rooms, *Before Yesterday We Could Fly* is composed of domestic spaces filled with objects: a kitchen/hearth area and a living room with a television and bookcase. But, unlike other period rooms, its objects range from the 16th century to the present day and come from all over the world. In a similar manner to Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum*, *Before Yesterday We Could Fly* “conveys the complexity of racial identity, suggesting the covert heritage of African-American[s]... in those persons society perceives as Caucasian.”¹

Just a few feet smaller than the gallery it occupies, the period room is a replica of a farmhouse from Seneca Village – the historic community of African American people on Manhattan’s Upper West Side that was destroyed by the city to expand Central Park. I was struck by the beautiful and unique synthesis of objects in the space (fig. 2). Sixteenth-century Murano glass mingles with contemporary ceramics, traditional African masks from Cameroon, and an iconic Willie Cole shoe sculpture (fig. 3). Cole’s work creates a bridge between traditional African works – specifically the masks from Cameroon – and contemporary art and everyday objects (shoes, irons, etc.).

The curators’ object choices pose powerful questions: What culture and history could have been nourished here? What understanding of beauty, culture, and history is missing because of erasure and racism? The mix of contemporary and historic objects makes this room a conversation about reconciling truths of the past with accomplishments and progress of today. The curators used the period room, a well-known museum exhibition trope, to pose powerful social questions through visual juxtaposition. They showed rather than told. *Before Yesterday We Could Fly* poses a challenge to museums with period rooms: What could these rooms become if curated with a focus on representation and inclusion rather than a social, economic, and most often historically white ideal?

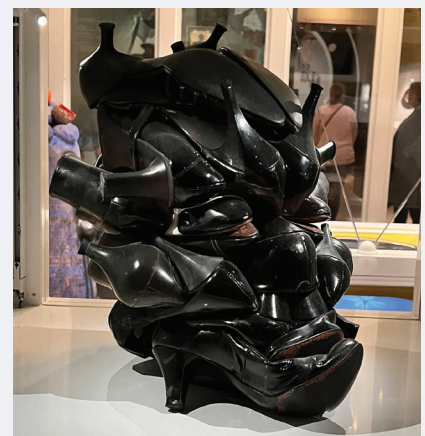


Fig. 3. Willie Cole, *Shine*, 2007. Much of Cole’s work puts a symbolic and figurative face to topics like the colonization, enslavement, and diaspora of African people.

Cameron Ledy, Independent Museum Professional

¹ Judith E. Stein, “Sins of Omission: Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum*,” *Art in America* 81, no. 10 (October 1993): 110.

In *The Falls*, Artist Sa'dia Rehman Gives Form to Displacement

BUFFALO ARTS STUDIO

Buffalo, New York

Entering Buffalo Arts Studio (BAS) this spring, I was drawn directly into *The Falls*, an exhibition by 2022/23 Displacement: Reclaiming Place, Space, and Memory artist-in-residence Sa'dia Rehman. Rehman created this collection of art in response to the 1974 displacement of their family and over 100,000 others following the construction of the Tarbela Dam in Pakistan.

Rehman's direct involvement in the curatorial process – alongside BAS Director of Visual Arts, Shirley Verrico – led to an exhibition occupying two of the venue's three rooms. Although compact, these intimate spaces encouraged profound engagement with the artworks.

I first encountered *Remnants*, a chalk and chalkboard-paint mural installation, which evoked the transient nature of displacement (fig. 1). Reflecting the experiences of both Buffalo's local immigrant populations and Rehman's own family, this mural set the exhibition's emotional tone.



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Fig. 1. Upon entering Buffalo Arts Studio, I was greeted by *Remnants*, a large temporary mural installation that mirrored the inability of the displaced to set down their own roots.

At the archway connecting the exhibition rooms, I came upon *To Witness*, a plaster hand in a fish tank, warped through the evaporation of water (fig. 2). The pointing hand propelled me into the second room, which housed *Flags Submerged*, an immersive time-lapse video and mixed-media experience that allowed me to personally experience being underwater through both video projections of surging waves rolling over unfired clay flags and the work's placement in the depths of the exhibition (fig. 3).

Through their use of clay, chalk, rust, and ink, Rehman was able to encapsulate the flooded landscape's altered essence and provide a tactile link to their ancestral land. Each artwork, balancing presence and absence, featured haunting images of faint trees and silt-laden waters masking submerged villages.

The Falls was more than an exhibition of art – the collection critiqued the power structures causing displacement and served as a tribute to those affected. The exhibition, by creating a space for thoughtful engagement with the experiences of displacement, prompted vital dialogue on our shared global responsibility.

Andrea Nero, Ph.D., Nero Strategies Group



Fig. 2. The placement of *To Witness* pulled me forward through the gallery. This spectral plaster hand evoked the past buried underwater by the construction of Tarbela Dam.

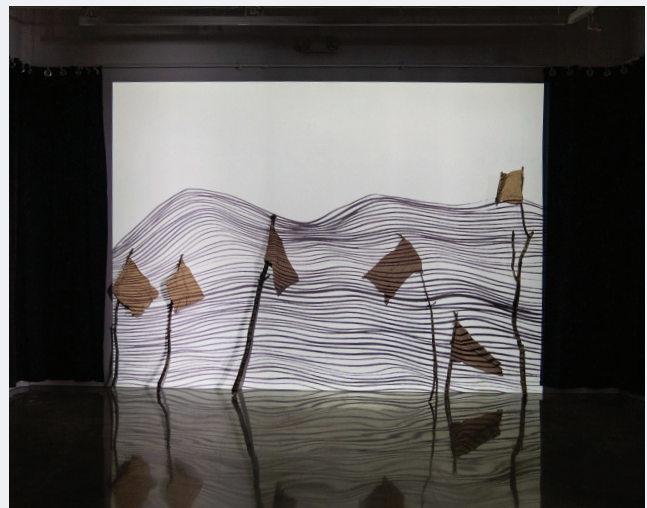


Fig. 3. In the second room, the immersive video experience *Flags Submerged* made me feel as though I were physically underwater in Rehman's family's former home.