

THE ARTIST PROJECT

WHAT
ARTISTS SEE
WHEN
THEY LOOK
AT ART

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

PHAIDON

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has always been a museum for artists, so it comes as no surprise when I hear from even the most cutting-edge of today's practitioners that this is where they go for inspiration. Wander through our Roman galleries and you might find Jeff Koons admiring a colossal Hercules or Adam Fuss moved by the ancient grave marker of a young girl. Deborah Kass could be a few galleries away looking at the Greek vases that she sees as "comics of another age." Kehinde Wiley navigates our European paintings galleries like he owns them—and he does (we all do; at The Met, ownership is the reward of long and careful looking, available to anyone). Kehinde might run into Nina Katchadourian while exploring our early Netherlandish portraits or Roz Chast among the Italian Renaissance works: all consumed by and consuming the work of their predecessors. And there are, of course, plenty of artists here every day whom we don't yet know, looking and learning, stretching to understand what has come before so they can embrace or reject it.

In 2015–16, while I was serving as Director of The Met, 120 artists collaborated with us to create an online feature called *The Artist Project*. Each artist chose a work of art or gallery that sparks their imagination and has significant meaning to them. Their ideas and responses were recorded and made into three-minute episodes released over the course of fifteen months. The artists were both local and international, working in a variety of media, and at different stages in their careers. That award-winning online series is the basis for this publication, which provides additional context for the artists' unique and passionate interpretations of The Met's collection. I hope it will encourage readers to look at art in a new way.

The Artist Project online feature, which was conceived and developed by a team led by Christopher Noey, Series Director, and Teresa Lai, Series Producer, would not have been possible without the support of Bloomberg Philanthropies, and I am grateful to them for having the foresight to support the online series as part of their Bloomberg Connects program. Phaidon, with its long history of creatively publishing books about art and contemporary artists, was the perfect publisher to deliver this volume, developed and overseen by Gwen Roginsky, Associate Publisher at The Met, and by Deborah Aaronson, Vice President, Group Publisher at Phaidon.

Finally, I want to thank the 120 artists who took precious time away from their studios to participate in this series and share their personal thoughts and insights. You can hear their voices and see more images online at artistproject.metmuseum.org. Their words give visibility to something we have known about The Met and its collection for a long time: it is a thrilling place for anyone to discover and be inspired.

Thomas P. Campbell

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“I look at the fractures as though they were intentionally made that way.”

I'm an artist who has used body fragments in my own work for thirty years. I grew up in New York and spent my youth wandering the Egyptian galleries, not really knowing why I was so attracted to them. It's been almost like a love affair, and because I encountered them so young, it has the resonance of a first love.

There's no movement in Egyptian art. It's about a stance. It's not as if the figures are dead at all—they feel very alive. They're not frozen, but they're not moving. It's about internal tension; it feels like they're going to explode outward.

For example, there is a group of sculptural fragments, and the way they are installed shows how those negative spaces between the fragments are energized, and the whole display becomes choreographed like a dance. Each fragment is so resonant and powerful. What's not there informs what is there. The head, the disembodied hands, the torsos become more monumental by not being complete. Your imagination is activated; you become more engaged as a viewer.

I dissect it. I look at the fragments in the case, and I see forms repeat over and over and over again. If I compare just the lips, they feel as though they're the same set of lips. It's not about likeness—it's about capturing the essence of the form. It's so simple that it conveys so much so quickly. There's incredible refinement of form. Maybe the fact that you focus on the fragment with such concentration makes it more powerful. It's poetic. The head is worn away—I just accept it as something beautiful. Winds and rain will affect stone that's outside; it's inevitable. We all want things to never change, but it's not possible.

I look very differently at these fragments than an art historian does, because I'm a maker, so the first thing I ask myself is, how was this made? If I had to make this now, how would I make it?

I look at the fractures as though they were intentionally made that way, as if this didn't happen by a force of nature. Someone didn't just lop off its nose—it always looked like this. It looks perfect. It looks so strong and believable and magical.

RONA PONDICK, *MONKEYS*, 1998–2001 ←

NOSE AND LIPS OF AKHENATEN, CA. 1353–1336 BC →

This fragment is believed to be a depiction of the pharaoh Akhenaten. The inner corner of one eye is visible alongside the nose. Although there is little to distinguish many representations of the king and the queen, particularly relatively early in the Amarna years, the especially long line alongside the nose and lips and the sinuous upper lip support this identification. The Met has many indurated limestone sculptural fragments from the Sanctuary of the Great Aten Temple, where they were broken up on site by the temple's destroyers. These fragments show considerable stylistic variability.



VITO ACCONCI
ANN AGEE
NJIDEKA AKUNYILI CROSBY
GHADA AMER
KAMROOZ ARAM
CORY ARCANGEL
JOHN BALDESSARI
BARRY X BALL
ALI BANISADR
DIA BATAL
ZOE BELOFF
DAWOUD BEY
NAYLAND BLAKE
BARBARA BLOOM
ANDREA BOWERS
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ROZ CHAST
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MAUREEN GALLACE
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LAURA MCPHEE
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JULIE MEHRETU
ALEXANDER MELAMID
MARIKO MORI
VIK MUNIZ
WANGECHI MUTU
JAMES NARES
CATHERINE OPIE
CORNELIA PARKER
IZHAR PATKIN
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RAYMOND PETTIBON
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RASHID RANA
KRISHNA REDDY
MATTHEW RITCHIE
DOROTHEA ROCKBURNE
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