April 10, 2020

**A Note...**
Rachel de W. Wixom  
President, Executive Director

Greetings from the Coe. I thought to try something a little different for this Eletter...

Wishing you, your families, and friends all our very best from the Coe.

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**First Steps**
Bess Murphy, PhD  
Curator

In thinking about my second weekly post to share with you since we all embarked upon the largest upheaval of my lifetime, I kept finding myself bumping up against a wall. I knew what I wanted to introduce to you, but how do you even begin in a time like this? I imagine that many of us are facing the same challenge right now, how do we take the first step in creating new work, in responding to radical disruptions in the plans we had in motion, in simply going out to the grocery store? It has been a week of cancellations for our community. We will continue to
I had my first virtual meeting with our **Hands-On Curators** last week. It was a tiny start, or maybe a move toward regrowth for this project. We got to see everyone in entirely new contexts. And we began thinking about how to continue with their exhibition, which was set to be an interactive installation built out as a domestic space centered on the theme of nostalgia. Their title, which they decided on months ago, is *(I'm Nostalgic for) Memories I've Never Lived Before*. How prescient is that? So now that they are experiencing a constant thrum of that nostalgia for the things that they won't be able to experience in the coming hours, days, and months they are brainstorming how to move from building a domestic space in a public venue to somehow creating a public iteration of their project from the domestic spaces that were their original inspiration.

Our first step was to meet. And I asked them all to share with me the songs that are carrying them through right now. They created a playlist that we are now so happy to pass on to you. You might not love all the songs, but you might also discover something new that will help get you through, too. We'll be listening while we begin to build on these first steps. Because we all need a soundtrack right now!

(A little p.s. Some of the songs are explicit. We are not censoring them, but you all know how to skip if there is something that doesn't work for you or your family. And thanks for listening!)

Above photo: selection of vinyl records

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**Flowers and Springtime at the Coe**
Bruce Bernstein, PhD
Director of Innovation, Chief Curator

All of us at the Coe send you our very best. What an unprecedented time for everyone. Yet, with our lives so dramatically and permanently changed, outdoors, things seem to progress as they always do this time of year with the definite arrival of spring. Green and flowers are beginning to appear everywhere.

Thinking of spring and how the season brings renewal and rebirth, I thought for this newsletter to put the word, "flower" into our database and see how many objects in the Coe collection might be identified.

My search identified fifty items with the word “flower” in its’ title and/or description. Of course, they all include flowers, but are made of so many different materials! Some are made from leather, others from split Ash, beadwork, moose hair, and paint. Some are abstract and others are realistic. I was intrigued that our database did not pull any objects that included flowers described either symbolically or metaphorically. Although there are flowers on baby boards intended to carry and protect infants; these flowers symbolize new and the renewal of life.

Here are a few selections with flowers to help us remember the rejuvenation and restoration of springtime! Please read on. An unintentional consequence of my search and thinking about the pieces that showed up as a result of the search, was to consider how and when Ted collected these items. Enjoy!
In 1988, Ted drove 2960 miles along the Transcontinental Highway to find these mukluks in Carmacks, Yukon. Leaving Carmacks he would drive 1095 miles to Fairbanks and then down to Anchorage, taking a combination of ferries and highways returning to New Mexico. Ted drove these trips with friend and fellow collector, Casey Jones who would eventually endow the Nelson-Atkins Museum Native arts programs and permanent installation. This would not be first or last time Ted drove this way.

Although keeping a lookout for a monumental pair of mukluks, I did not come upon anything after leaving Whitehorse, until arriving just under 300 miles further north along the Yukon at the fuel stop and accommodation center of the village of Carmacks. I put up in the one motel which was as comfortable as anything hundreds of miles further south and dinner consisted of burgers, fries, and pie, and that was the limit of the menu, unless you wanted a hot dog. I had found in the shop out on the main road, this pair, which has double soles for extra strength and warmth. I suspect they were just freshly made, because the beaver pelt trim is finer. [No doubt too, the new pair of mukluks smelled wonderfully of freshly smoked tanned moose hide] …the floral bouquets of the center panel and vamps appear like early flowers popping through the late snow. —Ted Coe
Around 1981, Ted purchased this gorgeous shawl from Osage Councilman Andrew Buddy Gray; the Grays are a distinguished Osage family. Artist and Santa Fe gallery owner Gina Gray (1954-2014) was one of Mr. Gray’s children. Gray was a well-known trader and Osage Councilman from whom Ted purchased eight pieces, today—all in the Coe Center collections.

In 1981, Ted was director of the Nelson Atkins Museum in Kansas City, fortunately for him, that meant he only needed to drive 225 miles to Pawhuska. In 1977, he had completed the monumental project, Sacred Circles in London and Kansas City. It forever changed the Nelson-Atkins and Ted. Ted’s next project was the traveling exhibition, Lost and Found Traditions where he visited Oklahoma Native communities. His visits to Mr. Gray over these years suggest that Gray was one of the thousands of Native peoples that traveled to Kansas City to see the exhibition or was amongst the many people who shared something about their communities with museum visitors as part of the Sacred Circles events at the Kansas City museum. The Sacred Circles programs were held seven days a week for the nine-week run of the exhibition; the programming helping to balance the historic focus of the exhibition.

Shawls have great currency in Oklahoma, they accompany people throughout their lives, shawls are danced, they are gifts and payments, and they tell people about your family and status.

*This blanket shawl* departs from the traditional geometrical appliqué design system seen in its Osage variants on many such blanket shawls, however during the 1920s an alternative was to bead large scale floral designs as a replacement... The present example, with its trellis-like stands of gladioli (the trellis idea is particularly suggested by the vertical side borders, which seem to climb) is executed in small, tubular beads... If such apparel was worn today to the Santa Fe Opera or a Carnegie Hall Concert, it would be stylishly in vogue! But the beadwork in this example, for whatever reason, was not entirely filled in along the left upper register. Though not quite completed it must have been, nevertheless, regarded as a family treasure and put aside for future use. —Ted Coe
Lena Barney (Yakima), *Bag*, 1977. Cornhusk and hemp fiber, 5.5 x 9.5 in. (14 x 24 cm). NAA0522

Photo of Lena Barney (Yakima), working on the cornhusk bag (*Lost and Found* cat. no. 226) as a demonstrator at the *Sacred Circles* exhibition, Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas, Missouri, 1977. © The American Federation of Arts.

Ted didn’t need to travel far to acquire this stunning piece, only to the Museum. Clearly, Ted had been negotiating with Ms. Barney for the duration of her museum visit. He was always an unapologetic collector.

*Lena Barney was one of many Native American artists invited to demonstrate during the course of the "Sacred Circles" exhibition showing at the Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City, MO, May-June, 1977. I watched her for several days working out the complex three-ply twining technique involved in this bag’s manufacture, whereby one strand is held in the teeth, and the other two are brought forward around it. A photograph of her looking up from her work is published in ‘Lost and Found Traditions’, fig. 14, p. 30. The design features three rows of strawberries with the outer rows having three strawberries, and the inner band two, so the two in the center are not yet ripe, while the outer bands convey the pictorial essence of the ripe fruit with great eloquence. On the morning of her departure, I went over to the motel to pick up the bag and found her laboriously chewing her breakfast. She looked up at me, took the bag from concealment on her lap, eyed me, whereupon I took three $100 bills from my pocket and laid them on the table. She finished handing me the bag and admonished me sternly "Now you take care of this."*—Ted Coe

*Lost and Found Traditions* was groundbreaking in including artists like Lena Barney. An appreciative scholar and basket weaver wrote: “The 1980s brought the recognition that traditional Indian arts are alive and, although produced on a smaller scale than in the nineteenth century, are continuing with surprising vitality. Ralph Coe spent a decade collecting contemporary example of traditional work.”
Indigenous Man (Batak) Palm Wine container, c. 1920. Northern Sumatra, probably from Lake Sentani area
Bamboo and wood, 16 x 7 in. (41 x 18 cm). AS0050

At first, I was puzzled why this water and/or fermented drink container showed up in my search, “flower.”

These bamboo vessels were used to carry water or tuak, a much favored alcoholic drink made from the fermented juice of the flowers of certain palm trees. —Ted Coe

Ted purchased this piece from a St. Louis based art dealer, collector, and philanthropist, Tom Alexander. People were drawn to Ted during his twenty-five years at the Nelson Atkins Museum. No surprise, of course there was Ted’s gregarious manner, but he also helped create a museum that was a touchstone for all the wonderful types of people who have an interest in things.

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