

Anne Klein

with a Baby in Transit



Willie Cole, 2009
2009.57

Sculpture: shoes, washers, wires, screws
Not on view, on loan.

Biography

Willie Cole was born in 1955 in Newark, NJ. He received his BA in Fine Arts from the NY School of Visual Arts and continued his studies at the Art Students League of New York. Cole was the first winner of the David C. Driskell Prize established by the High Museum of Atlanta to honor and celebrate African American art and art history. Cole's work is found in private collections and major museums. Says Cole, "I think that when one culture is dominated by another culture, the energy or powers or gods of the previous culture hide in the vehicles of the new

cultures. . . . I think the spirit of Shango (Yoruba god of thunder and lightning) is a force hidden in the iron because of the fire, and the power of Ogun--his element is iron--is also hidden in these metal objects." Cole lives and works near Newark, NJ.

Artist's inspiration and place in contemporary art

"Willie Cole's art is best known for assembling and transforming ordinary domestic and used objects such as irons, ironing boards, high-heeled shoes, hair dryers, bicycle parts, wooden matches, lawn jockeys, and other discarded appliances and hardware, into imaginative and powerful works of art and installations.

Through the repetitive use of single objects in multiples, Cole's assembled sculptures acquire a transcending and renewed metaphorical meaning, or become a critique of our consumer culture. Cole's work is generally discussed in the context of postmodern eclecticism, combining references and appropriation ranging from African and African American imagery, to Dada's readymades and Surrealism's transformed objects, and icons of American pop culture or African and Asian masks, into highly original and witty assemblages." (Wikipedia)

In an interview with the Huffington Post, Cole talks about his art this way:

"I am interested in creating a new perception wherein the viewer will never see the object that is the basis of my sculpture the same way again. I'm also very interested in exploring the idea that all things are the same thing and that all time is the same time."

Object Analysis

Text from ArtsConnectEd:

Influenced by African art, Willie Cole constructed this sculpture of mother and child from a stockpile of discarded high-heeled shoes. Cole has created similarly ironic artworks out of other used consumer objects, ranging from lawn jockeys and bicycle parts to salvaged irons and blow dryers. When reassembled by Cole, these cast-offs become potent objects that appear to issue from another time and place. Ann Klein with a Baby in Transit takes its name from the American fashion designer's label that appears inside two of the shoes. The rich black color and well-worn surfaces of the footwear evoke the beautiful patina of many African sculptures, such as those on view throughout these galleries. The mother and child grouping is a regal but tender homage to African cultural traditions. The woman seated on a throne of shoes refers to royal maternity sculptures. Most African maternity sculptures celebrate fertility and abundance, and though Cole's sculpture also represents abundance, it is of a very material sort—the waste of American consumer culture.

Cole has been working with shoes for the past four years. He says he didn't choose shoes, shoes chose him as the object for his work. Notice which parts of the shoes were used for the different parts of the sculptures.

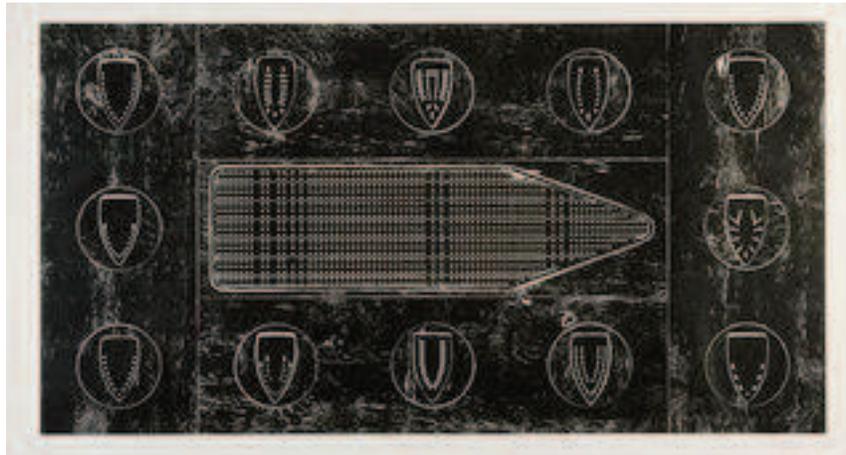


Willie Cole's "Made in the Philippines"
(Note : Not on Exhibition)



The Walker Art Center has an excellent example of Cole's early work using steam irons and scorchings. Please see below.

"While
was
in New



Willie Cole
growing up
Jersey, his

grandmother and great-grandmother worked as housekeepers and they often asked him to fix their irons. When he moved into his first artist studio, he brought 15 broken irons with him. For Cole, this common household appliance has a number of connotations: domestic servitude, African rituals of scarification, and an African heritage of "branding"-identifying particular tribes by way of shields or masks. To make the print *Stowage*, he grouped several different makes of irons (Silex, General Electric, Sunbeam) around an ironing board that is meant to represent a slave ship. The marks of the various irons evoke members of different African tribes who may have been brought to America aboard such a vessel. " Walker Art Center

Tour Questions

1. What words describe this sculpture?
2. (If the sculpture is in the African gallery)...What parts of this work seem inspired by African art? Look around the gallery, what African pieces have elements similar to Cole's? See especially the Yoruba Maternity Figure, 2002.27.24
3. (If you have a fashionista or two in your group)...what types of shoes do you see in this work? Why might the artist have chosen these particular shoes?
4. What other kinds of art can you think of that have been created with "found" or used materials? How did Cole shape the face, what expression do you see in it?

5. I used this piece for the theme "Maternal Instincts" and asked "In what ways does this work speak to the challenges of working women?"

You Tube Videos

Three Recommendations: (search "Willie Cole" on YouTube)

Contemporary Artist Willie Cole Works with Shoes. 3:21 minutes. Cole explains how he started working with shoes; good photos of his studio and the process.

MIA Artist in Residence: Willie Cole. 4:01 minutes. Good close ups of *Ann Klein with a Baby in Transit* and thoughtful commentary from Cole.

Art Inspires: Willie Cole on Delacroix and Japanese Guardian... 2 short videos in which Willie Cole comments on how these pieces at the MIA inspire him.

Possible Tours

Artist's Choices

Art Reflects Culture

Women in Art

Comparative Cultures

Made in America

Found Objects in Art

Sue Hamburge

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