



BLACK WHITE GRAY BLUE

Organized to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the American Civil War (1861–1865), *Black White Gray Blue* presents an unusual mix of historical and contemporary works—prints, sculptures, letters, and artifacts in which artists witness and interpret the War Between the States, its causes, and its legacy.

Nineteenth-century painter-illustrator **Winslow Homer** drew scenes of Civil War battles and daily life of the military and civilians from direct observation, and he designed lively compositions which, engraved in wood, were published in “Harper’s Weekly.” Homer also drew the portraits of many national figures and leaders, including Chief Justice Roger B. Taney (who in 1857 delivered the United States Supreme Court’s *Dred Scott* decision which

denied that Negroes could ever be citizens of the United States, or that slavery could be excluded from any territory); newly-elected United States President Abraham Lincoln; and Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America. The fine parallel and cross-hatched lines of Homer’s wood engravings epitomize the graphic language of nineteenth-century American mass media prints.

Each of the twentieth-century works in the exhibition addresses the memory, lingering effects, and profound entrenchment of the tragic history of slavery, racism, and war. **Jacob Lawrence** recalled the struggle for civil rights; and **Robert Colescott** created powerful images symbolizing troubled racial relationships. Towards the end of the twentieth century, **Kara Walker** and **Glenn Ligon**, and more recently, **Dario Robleto** adopted the graphic language and techniques



Winslow Homer
Hon. Abraham Lincoln, Born in Kentucky,
February 12, 1809 (Photographed by Brady),
 from "Harper's Weekly," November 10, 1860



Winslow Homer
The Songs of the War, from "Harper's Weekly,"
 November 23, 1861



Jacob Lawrence
The 1920s...The Migrants Cast Their Ballots,
 from "Spirit of Independence," 1974

of nineteenth-century art. These artists identify with, and speak in a contemporary voice about issues and events related to that war and violence in American society. Both Walker and Ligon conjure the horrors of slavery, which was one of the central causes contributing to the War Between the States. The images of runaway slaves, represented in many of Ligon's works in the exhibition, also relate to Des Moines' little-known but historic role in the Underground Railroad during the late 1850s.

At a time when access to voting rights—not to mention full equality and dignity—remained illusive, Lawrence made his screenprint of black migrants to the North registering to vote during the 1920s as his contribution to a 1974 portfolio celebrating the United States Bicentennial. Colescott's irony-filled, color lithograph of a black man and white woman who are shackled together with a heart-shaped chain is an icon of our nation's complicated history.

By appropriating the "old time look" of mid-nineteenth century visual styles and media, Walker, Robleto, and Ligon situate their work in an historical context. Their works simultaneously appear old *and* new. For example, Walker updated the forms of the eighteenth/nineteenth century silhouette, transforming seemingly-charming shapes of cut paper into horrific and violent narratives that indict the worst abuses of the slavery system.

In *Narratives*, a series of ten lithographs that playfully

address his identity as an American, gay, and black man, Glenn Ligon appropriated the format and typography of nineteenth-century novels' title pages. Additionally, in his series *Runaways*, Ligon used the nineteenth-century technique of photogravure to re-present wood engraved prints from nineteenth-century advertisements used to find and recapture runaway slaves. Instead of containing descriptions of actual slaves, the texts in Ligon's prints describe the artist as seen by his friends.

In *Greenville Sanitary Fair*, Robleto channels and re-creates the graphic forms and decorative elements of Civil War-era advertising and sentimental motifs. In *Who Will Mend Your Phantom Limbs?*, Robleto incorporates the fourth dimension of time—embodied as historic objects, recordings of sound, original letters, and bullets—into constructions that are practically objects from a parallel universe of history.

Black White Gray Blue also includes three remarkable Civil War artifacts from local collections. These forge potent and unexpected connections with the artworks on view. A letter written during the Civil War by William H. Deen, a soldier from Knoxville, Iowa, tells of Union soldiers' life and entertainment, a theme also illustrated in Homer's wood engraving, *Songs of the War*. In another letter, his relative Robert H. Deen writes his thoughts about Lincoln's death to his family. A sword used during the Civil War by military



Glenn Ligon
Untitled, plate 1 from "Runaways," 1993



Dario Robleto
Who Will Mend Your Phantom Limbs?, 2007–2010



Robert Colescott
Lock and Key I, 1989

surgeon Dr. George P. Hanawalt (for whom Hanawalt Elementary School in Des Moines is named) is also on view. Hanawalt's wife Emily's family home—the Jordan House in West Des Moines—was a station on the Underground Railroad during the 1850s.

Visualized as a sequence of colors, “Black,” “White,” “Gray,” and “Blue” are the darks and lights of a primary hue. Read or spoken as words, they cast figurative light and shadow on the works in the exhibition, with their shades of meaning. Said together, the words “black” and “white” can allude to race relations—even though “black” skin is not really black, and “white” skin is not really white. Used metaphorically, “black and white” can signify the opposition of absolute certainties, or on the contrary, something definitive. “Black-and-white” can refer to the graphic media—such as the wood engravings, etchings, photogravures, lithographs, and silhouettes in the exhibition. Bruises turn “black-and-blue.” “Gray” can symbolize old age, as well as lack of definition. “Blue” can represent both nobility and sadness. And of course, “gray” and “blue” were the colors of the uniforms worn by the soldiers of the Confederate and Union armies.

Amy N. Worthen, curator of prints and drawings

EXHIBITION PROGRAMS

Gallery Talk

Amy N. Worthen, curator of prints and drawings
 Thursday, October 6 / 6:30 pm
 Print Gallery

Talk + Music

“Roll It Along Thro’ the Nation”:
 From Slave to Citizen in
 Popular Song
 Michael Lasser, music historian
 Thursday, October 13 / 6:30 pm
 Levitt Auditorium

This lecture is supported by Humanities Iowa and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The views and opinions expressed by this program do not necessarily reflect those of Humanities Iowa or the National Endowment for the Humanities.



Kara Walker
The Means to an End...A Shadow Drama in Five Acts, 1995

This gallery guide is published in conjunction with *Black White Gray Blue*. The exhibition is on view in the Print Gallery of the Des Moines Art Center from September 23, 2011–January 29, 2012.

Black White Gray Blue is organized by Amy N. Worthen, curator of prints and drawings.

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Cover:

Winslow Homer
The War for the Union 1862–A Bayonet Charge, from "Harper's Weekly," July 12, 1862

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Robert Colescott

American, 1921–2009

Lock and Key I, 1989

Lithograph on paper
 Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Gift of Cynthia and Jack Rehm in honor of the Des Moines Art Center's 50th Anniversary, 1998.35
Illustrated

Winslow Homer

American, 1836–1910

Hon. Abraham Lincoln, Born in Kentucky, February 12, 1809

(Photographed by Brady), from "Harper's Weekly," November 10, 1860
 Electrotpe from wood engraving with typographic text on paper
 Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Richard and Kay Ward Collection, 2003.71
Illustrated

Hon. Roger B. Taney, Chief-Justice of the United States (Photographed by Brady), from "Harper's Weekly," December 8, 1860

Electrotpe from wood engraving with typographic text on paper
 Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Richard and Kay Ward Collection, 2003.72

The Seceding Mississippi

Delegation in Congress (Photographed by Brady), from "Harper's Weekly," February 2, 1861
 Electrotpe from wood engraving with typographic text on paper
 Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Richard and Kay Ward Collection, 2003.76

The Songs of the War, from "Harper's Weekly," November 23, 1861

Electrotpe from wood engraving with typographic text on paper
 Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Richard and Kay Ward Collection, 2003.207
Illustrated

A Bivouac Fire on the Potomac, from "Harper's Weekly," December 21, 1861

Electrotpe from wood engraving with typographic text on paper
 Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Richard and Kay Ward Collection, 2003.208

The War for the Union 1862–A Cavalry Charge, from "Harper's Weekly," July 5, 1862

Electrotpe from wood engraving with typographic text on paper
 Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Richard and Kay Ward Collection, 2003.212

The War for the Union 1862–A Bayonet Charge, from "Harper's Weekly," July 12, 1862

Electrotpe from wood engraving with typographic text on paper
 Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Richard and Kay Ward Collection, 2003.213
Illustrated

Our Women and the War, from "Harper's Weekly," September 6, 1862

Electrotpe from wood engraving with typographic text on paper
 Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Richard and Kay Ward Collection, 2003.214

Pay-Day in the Army of the Potomac, from "Harper's Weekly," February 28, 1863

Electrotpe from wood engraving with typographic text on paper
 Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Richard and Kay Ward Collection, 2003.215

Jacob Lawrence

American, 1917–2000

The 1920s...The Migrants Cast Their Ballots, from "Spirit of Independence," 1974

Screenprint on paper
 Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Gift of Lorillard, New York, 1975.40.8
Illustrated

Glenn Ligon

American, born 1960

"Runaways," 1993

Ten untitled lithographs on paper
 Each 16 x 12 in. (40.6 x 30.5 cm.)
 Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Gift of The Bohem Foundation, New York, 1994.19.1–10
Illustrated (1994.19.1)

"Narratives," 1993

Folks and Places Abroad To Disembark, or, The Price of the Ticket

Incidents in the Life of a Snow Queen
A Pilgrimage to my Mother's Land
The Narrative of the Life and Uncommon Sufferings of Glenn Ligon, A Colored Man...
A Colored Man Round the World, or A Stranger in the Village

Black Rage; or, How I Got Over; or, Sketches of the Life and Labors of Glenn Ligon
The Life and Adventures of Glenn Ligon, A Negro
Black Like Me or The Authentic Narrative of Glenn Ligon A Black Man

Nine etchings on chine collé
 Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Gift of The Bohem Collection, 1994.20.1–9

Dario Robleto

American, born 1972

Who Will Mend Your Phantom Limbs?, 2007–2010

Excavated bullets from various wars carved into spoons, hair salvaged from excavated lockets, homemade paper (cotton, passion flower), stretched audio tape of the earliest audio recording of time (experimental clock, 1878), 10,000-year-old flower caught in amber, carved bone and ivory, braided hair, lead-coated rose stem, ribbon, mourning handkerchief, locket, photograph, cast lamp black, resin, typeset, paint
 Courtesy of the artist and Inman Gallery, Houston, Texas
Illustrated

Greenville Sanitary Fair, 2005
 Homemade paper (pulp made from soldiers' letters home from various wars, ink retrieved from letters, cotton), colored paper, thread and fabric from soldiers' uniforms from various wars, carte de visites, silk ribbon, wood clothespins, foam core, poplar, ash
 Collection of Dr. Louis and Lois Fingerman

Kara Walker

American, born 1969

The Means to an End...A Shadow Drama in Five Acts, 1995

Etching and aquatint on paper
 Five sheets, each 34 1/2 x 23 1/4 in. (87.6 x 59.1 cm.)
 Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections; Gift of Doreen M. and Kirk V. Blunck, 2009.72.a–e
Illustrated

Artifacts

Medical Corps Sword Carried by Dr. George P. Hanawalt During the Civil War
 Loaned by the West Des Moines Historical Society, West Des Moines

Letter dated October 14, 1864, Jefferson City, MO, written by William H. Deen to his mother Charity Deen, commenting on life and entertainment of the Union troops.
 Collection of William P. Bennett

Letter dated May 19, 1865, Murraysville, IL, written by Robert H. Deen to his sister-in-law, Charity Deen, commenting on the death of President Lincoln.
 Collection of William P. Bennett

