

MMFA

Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MONTGOMERY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS AND ALABAMA SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL COLLABORATE ON NEW OUTDOOR EXHIBITION

Sixteen images featuring scenes from Shakespeare's most famous plays installed in Blount Cultural Park with accompanying audio performances by ASF actors.



Photograph of the 2021 installation of the exhibition *A Stroll with Shakespeare: The Boydells and the Bard* at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery, Alabama.

Montgomery, AL, March 24, 2021 – *A Stroll with Shakespeare: The Boydells and the Bard* offers visitors to the Blount Cultural Park an outdoor experience that connects across the arts—from performance, to the visual, to the written word. A collaboration between the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) and the Alabama Shakespeare Festival (ASF), this installation features engravings—now in the Museum's collection—that document paintings from the late 1780s displayed in the famous Shakespeare Gallery in London. In this outdoor experience, the images are accompanied by vivid descriptions written by ASF staff and audio recordings of ASF actors bringing each scene to life.

The original paintings were commissioned by John Boydell, a London civic leader who had a vision: bring art and commerce together, creating a system of support for British artists while ensuring that art flourished as a profitable enterprise.

MMFA Senior Curator Margaret Lynne Ausfeld notes that “Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery project was an innovation that sought to engage public interest and patriotism by combining the achievements of England’s most famous playwright with the creative talents of its visual artists. He wanted his countrymen to respect and patronize native English artists in the same way they valued the works of great European painters.”

Regarding the accompanying audio recordings, ASF Artistic Director Rick Dildine reminds us that Shakespeare “wrote plays to be heard...using iambic pentameter which gives his writings a rhythm for the actor to perform,” and additionally invites visitors to “listen along and hear how the words help drive the pace.”

MMFA Director Angie Dodson adds “MMFA Senior Curator Margaret Lynne Ausfeld gets it right when, in the audio tour, she says ‘Our hope for Art Walk and other programs like it is to do more work outside of the museum’s walls and inside of the lives of River Region residents and visitors.’ And, for me, another notable point about this project is that it demonstrates the power and potency of partnerships—in this case, our working as a creative collective with our friends and neighbors over at ASF.”

ABOUT JOHN BOYDELL’S SHAKESPEARE GALLERY

Few paintings by British artists were seen on the walls of English collectors of art in the 18th century. Royal palaces and mansions of the wealthy contained works by Italians, French, and Germans but almost no English.

Both an Alderman of the City of London (and, from 1790-91, the city’s Lord Mayor), John Boydell sought to change that when he hired British artists to create paintings depicting scenes and characters from Shakespeare’s plays.

Wide public interest and patriotism enhanced Shakespeare’s reputation in the 18th century and made his work ideal as the foundation for a national school of British painting. Boydell, a highly successful businessman and proprietor of the country’s largest print-selling establishment, conceived of a project with two other parts beyond the exhibition gallery: a folio of engraved prints reproducing the Gallery’s paintings, and an illustrated 9 volume edition of Shakespeare’s plays. His vision was to forge an alliance between the worlds of commerce and art in order to support British artists by ensuring their art would be profitable.

But, while it was a popular success, Boydell’s grand scheme was a financial failure. After some 20 years the Gallery itself was dismantled in the same year as the publication of *Boydell’s Graphic Illustrations of the Dramatic Works of Shakespeare* in 1805. This installation in Montgomery’s Blount Cultural Park introduces the engravings of the Boydell paintings that are the most lasting part of the Alderman’s dream to unite art and literature in the service of a British national identity.

Support for this exhibition was provided by Art Bridges, an organization founded by visionary arts patron Alice Walton that is dedicated to making art more accessible to the public.

RELATED PROGRAMS

While we are glad to welcome visitors back to the Museum, we also maintain our commitment to supporting and keeping connected with those who are not yet ready to return to the Museum and



John Boydell (English, 1719–1804), Publisher; Josiah Boydell (English, 1752–1817), Publisher; James Parker (English, 1750–1805), Engraver; after Henry Fuseli (Swiss, 1741–1825), Painter, *Midsummer-Night’s Dream*, Act 2, Scene 1, about 1804, from *Boydell’s Graphic Illustrations of the Dramatic Works of Shakespeare*, engraving on paper, Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts Association Purchase and Gift of Francis Drexel Smith by exchange, 2016.8.4

those who've come to value their online access to the Museum. With this in mind, the programs associated with these exhibitions will all be accessible online.

Creative Conversations: A Stroll with Shakespeare

Wednesday, April 21, 5:30 PM

Facebook Live Event ([facebook.com/montgomerymfa](https://www.facebook.com/montgomerymfa))

Free

Join MMFA Curator Margaret Lynne Ausfeld and Alabama Shakespeare Festival Dramaturg Susan Willis for insights on the outdoor exhibition, *A Stroll with Shakespeare: The Boydells and the Bard*.

ABOUT ART WALK

In the fall of 2020, the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts launched its first outdoor exhibition installed around Newell Lake in Blount Cultural Park. Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and the desire for safe outdoor experiences, *Voices of Change* featured 10 of photographer Yousuf Karsh's (Canadian, born Armenia, 1908–2002) portraits representing figures who have made an impact on our world through their leadership and ideals, words, and actions. This initial exhibition will soon travel to parks around Montgomery, while future exhibitions are in development.

ALABAMA SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL BACKGROUND

Alabama Shakespeare Festival, the State's theatre, builds community by engaging, entertaining, and inspiring people with transformative theatrical performances and compelling educational and community programs. From its founding in a high school auditorium in Anniston in 1972 to its designation as the State Theatre of Alabama in 1977 to the stunning \$21.5 million performing arts complex in Montgomery (built in 1985), ASF has been a leader in the performing arts throughout the state, region, and country. As a beloved Alabama arts institution, ASF broadens the cultural identity of the South by producing classics, Shakespeare, contemporary plays, musicals, theatre for young audiences, and exciting new works. Since its inception, ASF has provided education programs to more than one million students; annually, SchoolFest, a student-matinee program, presents high-quality theatrical experiences to nearly 35,000 students.

MMFA BACKGROUND

The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts was founded in 1930 by a group of local artists as a place for both exhibiting art and space for art education. The original intentions of our founders—to exhibit and teach—continue to inspire and inform every action and activity here at the Museum which, since 1988, has shared the 277-acre Blount Cultural Park with our partners across the lake at the celebrated Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

Today's MMFA visitors stroll art-studded grounds and permanent collection galleries. They see compelling changing exhibitions and learn about art by playing in our interactive gallery, Artworks, making art in its bustling studios, or by participating in other engaging events and programs. And, as of late September 2018, MMFA visitors can now relax and recharge in the serenity of our stunning new three-acre sculpture garden.

While the Museum's collection is still home to the art of many of the regional artists who first established it, over time, it has become known for its strength in American art and Old Master Prints. Recent, important acquisitions of art made by African American and Asian artists and works inspired by images and themes related to the experiences of these groups represent the breadth and depth of

the lives and concerns of those who now call Montgomery and the River Region home. Through the exhibition of this work as well as the programs and events that help connect our communities with it, the MMFA is recognized as a leading arts and cultural resource here in the state and Southeastern region.

The MMFA is a department of the City of Montgomery and is supported by funds from the City of Montgomery, with additional funds from the Montgomery County Commission and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts Association. Programs are made possible, in part, by grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

GENERAL INFORMATION

WHAT: *A Stroll with Shakespeare: The Boydells and the Bard*

WHEN: Exhibition: Spring 2021
Creative Conversations: Wednesday, April 21, 2021, 5:30 PM

WHERE: Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts
Wynton M. Blount Cultural Park
One Museum Drive
Montgomery, AL 36117

INFORMATION: mmfa.org
334.625.4333
@MontgomeryMFA

HOURS:
Galleries, Mondays, Closed
Sculpture Garden, Tuesdays–Saturdays, 10 AM–5 PM
Terrace, and Store: Sundays, Noon to 5 PM
Last entry at 4:45 PM

ADMISSION: Free! With ample, free parking.

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MEDIA CONTACT

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