



**Crystal Bridges**  
Museum of American Art

## **Alice Walton Talks Art**

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# Introduction to Alice Walton Talks Art Tour

## Welcome to Alice Walton Talks Art

**ALICE WALTON:** I'm Alice Walton, and I am delighted to take you on this tour today. Art has been an education for me. I grew up without access to museums, which is why Crystal Bridges exists. And I had to learn as an adult anything that I wanted to know about art; and it is the best education that any person could ever have. So I would love to start this tour by saying that when I started collecting, I knew nothing. I collected what I loved, then read about it and learned from there. You don't have to know anything to find that connection to a great piece of art. And that connection itself is a soulful, a spiritual connection when you find it. And I would encourage you to seek it on your trip today.

[End of Stop]

## ***We the People*, Nari Ward**

### **Who We Are As a People**

**ALICE WALTON:** Nari Ward is one of my favorite artists, and I believe this is one of the most important works in the Crystal Bridges collection. We were actually at the Barnes Museum, the curators and I, looking at that great museum outside of Philadelphia. And this sculpture, I call it a wall sculpture, was on exhibition. And it's one of those rare times when I got total shivers and almost started to cry. But to me, his wall sculpture, *We the People*, stands for everything we believe in at Crystal Bridges.

It's beautiful, it refers to the history and the beginning words of the Constitution, and it declares in detail really, who America as a people are.



**ALICE CONTINUES:** And if you look at it closely, it's made of shoelaces--long shoelaces, short shoelaces, fat, skinny, in every color under the rainbow. And the significance is that, that's who we are as a people; we are the melting pot of the world.

So having this piece at the opening to Crystal Bridges is really important to me. Nari is a Jamaican-born artist. He was based in Harlem for 25 years, and did an artist-in-residency program in Philadelphia. This is kind of a sculpture's version of Jackson Pollock's drip, if you think about it.

[End of Stop]

# ***We the People*, Nari Ward**

## **Development of the Collection**

**ALICE WALTON:** A little history about how the collection developed. I had no background in art history, and when I saw these first beautiful Homer watercolors that I bought back in the late '80s, I decided that if they cost that much, I better start reading and learning about what I was buying.

So I started down the path of reading everything I could get my hands on and using all my spare time to read art books about artists, about periods of art, about groups of artists. And that's really how I've gotten my education. But I often say that my education never really started until I met art and started reading art books, because the understanding that I've gotten of our great country and its complex history it is the most valuable education I've had, and the most important.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** And so I would really encourage those of you that are interested to find an artist, find a period that you like, and try it out. It is an education and a history in three dimensions, unlike you get any other way.

[End of Stop]

# ***George Washington, Charles Willson Peale***

## **Washington in His Prime**

**ALICE WALTON:** So one of my favorite paintings-- and let me just warn you that whatever painting I'm talking about always ends up one of my favorite paintings. But one of my truly favorite paintings is the painting of George Washington.

Charles Willson Peale is the father of the most famous art family in America and the first art family in America. Charles Willson Peale actually created the first museum in America.

[Pause]

But the Charles Willson Peale of George Washington was painted during Washington's life.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** And one of the things I love about it is that it shows Washington in his prime, right after the revolution, and he is depicted with the battle of Yorktown in the background. The sash indicates that he is the Commander in Chief, and of course Yorktown was one of the most decisive and important battles that really turned the tide in the Revolutionary War. So the history of the portrait is just as important as the painting.

[Pause]

When Washington was the head of the war effort, he had a young French nobleman named Chastellux that was his right-hand aide. Actually it was Alexander Hamilton and Chastellux were his two aides, which is quite interesting.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** Chastellux became very endeared to Washington, and in fact after the war and the victory by America and America achieving its independence, Chastellux returned to France.

This painting was painted as a gift to Chastellux. So the painting returned to France and has hung in the Chastellux Castle until we were able to purchase it at auction. When the Chastellux family found that the painting was going to be owned by a public institution and shown always to the public, they were thrilled. And so they contacted us at Crystal Bridges and gave us copies of all the letters between Washington and Chastellux, which continued after the war to the end of Washington's life. We have copies of those letters in our library if you'd like to look them up.

[End of Stop]

## ***Johnny, Susie J. Lee***

### **Putting a Face to Fracking**

**ALICE WALTON:** Well, here we go again. *Johnny*, I call him my boyfriend, and he usually sits next to George, *George Washington*, who's my other boyfriend. But Johnny is by an artist that was in our first *State of the Art*, in 2014 and '15. A fabulous artist from North Dakota, Susie J. Lee. Susie grew up in North Dakota, very was sensitive to all the pro and anti-fracking conversations going on in the world and the friction between the environmentalist and the oil and gas industry, and very cognizant of the need for those jobs in a rural state such as North Dakota, and the impact of those jobs on people in that state.

So she really wanted to put a face to fracking. And I love this video portrait of Johnny, just sitting and allowing us to know him in our own way.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** So, don't let *Johnny* shock you when he blinks his eyes or moves around, but it's a 30-minute loop of Johnny just sitting and being who he is, a North Dakota fracker.

[End of Stop]



# ***Mrs. Jacob Franks (Abigaill Levy), Gerardus Duyckinck I***

## **The Largest and Earliest Family Portrait Group**

**ALICE WALTON:** Oh, we're on to another of my favorites, Abigaill Levy Franks who is *Mrs. Jacob Franks*, by Gerardus Duyckinck.

Abigail is the matron of the Levy Franks family. These portraits were painted in 1735 prior to, of course, the revolution when New Amsterdam was the prior name of New York, and this family was one of several Ashkenazi Jewish families living in New York. But it's really interesting what happened. I've probably learned more from Abigail and her family than any other piece of art in my life. And it's a fascinating story, so I'm going to tell you.

[Pause]

**ALICE CONTINUES:** We were looking at Winslow Helmer letters prior to this Sotheby's art auction, and up in it was in a study room with chalkboards and all of that, and above the chalkboard set, Abigail Levy Franks.

And I was just amazed by this beautiful painting so early in American history, 1735. So I asked them to tell me the story. Well, we got the curator and learned that lo and behold, not only Abigail but her whole family, six portraits of the Levy Franks family were going to auction and were to be sold separately. I also learned that this was the largest and earliest family portrait group in American art. I talked with the curators and our management and we decided this was incredibly important and that we had to keep these paintings together if there were any way.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** So we were able to negotiate with a seller prior to the auction and buy them as a group.

This was, gosh--six years, five or six years before Crystal Bridges opened its door. So we put them on loan to the Jewish Museum in New York in the meantime.

[End of Stop]

# ***After the Last Supper, Devorah Sperber***

## **Science and Math in Art**

**ALICE WALTON:** I think one of the most interesting artists in our Crystal Bridges collection is a wonderful contemporary artist by the name of Devorah Sperber, *After the Last Supper* done in 2005. Some of you may remember it from our opening because it is a crowd favorite and one of my personal favorites. There is so much science and math in art, and it's something we rarely get to talk about. But this piece is a great example of a great piece of art, a masterwork after a masterwork that combines so many subjects. It's art, it's science, it's technology, and it's the influence of all those things on what we see and how we perceive things.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** I'm really interested in how the human brain makes sense of the visual world and reality as a subjective experience. You know, the old saying, 'what you see is what you get'? Well, that ain't true [laughter]. And this painting will show you that. *[After] The Last Supper* of course is constructed after Leonardo da Vinci's famous *The Last Supper*, which is in Milan, Italy. And I'm happy to say that I've had the opportunity to see that amazing piece in person that was done in 1498. It's a mural in the dining hall of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, Italy.

[End of Stop]

## ***Landscape, Robert Duncanson***

### **Reference to Hudson River Landscapes**

**ALICE WALTON:** Robert Seldon Duncanson is a great artist, and really one of the first African American artists whose art was accepted in America. He really takes a lot from the Hudson River landscape. Robert was born to a white father, a Canadian father and a free African American mother, and grew up in Cincinnati. At times, he was acclaimed because of his great, great talent, and overcame the racism of the time. But when the Civil War was approaching, he moved back to Canada because of the racism and the race issue. And there, he was very famous and acclaimed as one of their great artists.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** But this is a beautiful piece with a great reference to the Hudson River landscape group, but Robert was never really considered a part of that because of his mixed heritage.

[End of Stop]

## ***Kindred Spirits*, Asher B. Durand**

### **The Acquisition that Announced the Museum**

**ALICE WALTON:** *Kindred Spirits* is, I think maybe our most famous painting--one of the most famous paintings in American art history.

[Pause]

And I and maybe most of you, saw the picture of *Kindred Spirits* in your school book on American history. I never had an art class so I know I saw it in American history. But it was owned by the New York Library, and the New York Library's mission was books, not art.



**ALICE CONTINUES:** [Laughter] And it was the acquisition of *Kindred Spirits* that caused us to announce the museum. We put in a bid in this closed bid process and we won, barely. And the bid was supposed to be secret and in five minutes the Associated Press had it out on the national wires that I had bought the painting and I thought my goodness, they're going to think I'm going to put that on my fireplace. I can't let that happen, because I wouldn't buy it for that. I wanted this for the people of our region. And so we announced Crystal Bridges that afternoon [laughter].

[End of Stop]

## ***The Bathers, Marisol***

### **Marisol's Self-Portrait**

**ALICE WALTON:** So *The Bathers* by Marisol, is a promised gift to Crystal Bridges. I bought it because I fell in love with it, and I was going to put it in my house, but it's never been in my house. It went directly to Crystal Bridges when the curator saw it. *The Bathers* is actually a self-portrait of the great contemporary artist named Marisol who was, part of the Abstract Expressionist movement.

If you look closely, you'll see forms of a derriere, feet, toes, hands, and actually all those are plaster forms from Marisol's body. So, this is indeed a self-portrait, which makes it very special. It's interesting, women don't do many self-portraits. Men love to do self-portraits, but when women do self-portraits, they are usually pretty big and pretty spectacular, and this is a perfect example.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** Marisol was born in Paris, France, to wealthy Venezuelan parents. The family traveled extensively from France, and moved from France to the US during her childhood. So Marisol, the name she adopted, is actually a shortened version of Maria Sol Escobar, her real name.

[End of Stop]

# ***Robert Louis Stevenson and His Wife*, John Singer Sargent**

## **A Mysterious Composition**

**ALICE WALTON:** *Robert Louis Stevenson and His Wife*, done in 1885 by the one and only John Singer Sargent, who I personally believe is probably the greatest artist in American art from the 1800s. For 1885, the composition is so mysterious and so unusual and everybody wonders where the heck Robert Louis Stevenson is going and why his wife is over there in the corner in Lord knows what [laughter], some fancy costume with glitter on it.

So John Singer Sargent painted this painting of Robert Louis Stevenson. They were close personal friends, and in 1883 to '84, Sargent painted perhaps his most famous painting, *Madame X*, which is at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** But at the time, remember this is Victorian society, and the world is very prim and proper, and *Madame X* was taboo and off-limits. So Sargent was ostracized. All of his society portraits that he had scheduled to paint in London were canceled by society because he had painted this outrageously sexy, provocative piece called *Madame X*. So he was forced to paint his friends, which is how this portrait of Stevenson and his wife came about.

[End of Stop]

## ***The Lantern Bearers, Maxfield Parrish***

### **Who is an artist and Who is an Illustrator?**

**ALICE WALTON:** *The Lantern Bearers* from 1908 is one of my favorite paintings. And oops, I said that again, didn't I [laughter]? By the great artist and illustrator Maxfield Parrish. So one of the interesting things in American art is, who gets categorized as an artist and who doesn't.

So it's been interesting to me to see the change in the attitude towards illustration and illustrators. Maxfield Parrish, N.C. Wyeth, and of course the most famous of all, Norman Rockwell. But when I first started collecting, most of these paintings were relatively inexpensive for the quality of art that they were, because the illustrators always were not quite accepted in the canon of American art, in the history of American art, by the art professionals.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** *The Lantern Bearers* came up for auction at one of the auction houses. And I was so excited about it because I've always loved this painting. The curators and I, our art committee, were all in agreement, that this was a great, great painting, an icon really. And that we wanted it. So we set a maximum price, and the painting came up and the bidding kept going up and up and up. I looked at Don Bacigalupi, at the time our executive director, and I went, "We've got to get this one." So I kept raising my hand and we did finally get it [laughter]. So we try to have a lot of discipline in our acquisition effort. And it's really important to have discipline. But this is one instance in which we made that split-second decision to break that discipline and continue bidding. And it worked out [chuckle].

[End of Stop]

## ***The Widow, Janet Sobel***

### **More than a Housewife**

**ALICE WALTON:** Janet Sobel is a really fascinating artist. She immigrated to the United States in 1908. Woman artist, self-trained. Janet was a Jewish immigrant. They fled the atrocities in the Ukraine, her family did with her. And when you look at this beautiful, beautiful painting, you see those atrocities in so many of the figures. They also refer back to the ancient tradition of folk art in the Ukraine.

She actually lived in New Jersey and borrowed her child's school art supplies to make her work on the kitchen floor.

Gertrude Whitney happened to see Janet Sobel's work and was so enthusiastic, that she gave her a one-woman show.



**ALICE CONTINUES:** As it happens--for those of you that are interested in art history, but it's really interesting anyway--Jackson Pollock came to that show, and there were drip paintings, some of which Crystal Bridges owns, in that show. And shortly thereafter, Jackson Pollock started dripping.

Crystal Bridges is very proud to try to bring her back into focus in the canons of art history, because of the very dominant role she played even as a self-taught artist in the world of art history.

The way art history gets written is that, it's only important artists that the curators and critics deem, that go into the canon.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** And because Janet Sobel was self-taught, and a woman, and a housewife, she was never really entered into that canon. And we hope that today's curators fix that oversight.

[End of Stop]

## ***Divinity Lotus, Agnes Pelton***

### **Spiritual and Natural Connections**

**ALICE WALTON:** When I first saw *Divinity Lotus* by Agnes Pelton, I just, I got the goosebumps. Agnes is a West Coast artist, part of the early Modernist movement, but very much influenced by the spiritual connection and natural connection, so she really transcends art in a way that ties to the spiritual and to the natural. Agnes is just now really being recognized for her beautiful work.

Agnes is also a contemporary of Georgia O'Keeffe. I'm not sure they ever met, but you can see the connection of nature. But I think that Agnes focuses more on the spiritual, transcendental side of nature than O'Keeffe--see what you think.

[End of Stop]

# ***Blackwell's Island*, Edward Hopper**

## **A Very Unique Hopper**

**ALICE WALTON:** Another one of my favorite paintings, and really one of our most important paintings is Edward Hopper's *Blackwell's Island* from 1928. It's actually one of the great Hoppers and a very unique Hopper, a very early Hopper in his career. One of the important early pieces.

Blackwell's Island is now known as Roosevelt Island, which you can see from the city of New York and it had the famous prisons on it, which are shown in the painting. But one of the interesting things about this painting, and in many of Hopper's paintings, you can feel the isolation of the individual. Hopper is one of the most important artists in American art history without question. And as a student learning and reading, I always wondered why his paintings had this stiffness to them.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** And before I really had studied Hopper much, I thought it was because he couldn't paint very well [laughter].

And then I got to see a Hopper drawing show at the Whitney in New York several years ago. And I discovered that he's one of the great draftsman and artists of the human figure that ever lived. And that's when I realized that the stiffness in his paintings is very intentional. And it's a combination of the stiffness and the friction that give the isolation, I think, to his art. So when you look at this, he uses the water in a really interesting way in this painting to create the isolation and the ominous feel of the island. And it really is a masterpiece of stillness, of isolation.

[End of Stop]

# ***Tobacco Sorters, Thomas Hart Benton***

## **An Artists' Local Connections**

**ALICE WALTON:** I'd like to tell you about one of my favorite fellows Thomas Hart Benton, who's basically a local.

[Pause]

Thomas Hart Benton grew up in Neosho Missouri, 60 miles from Bentonville, and his great uncle was the famous Missouri senator for 30 years named Thomas Hart Benton. The reason Bentonville is named what it is and Benton County has its name is from the Senator Thomas Hart Benton. So it's kind of a neat connection to our region and our history. So when I was growing up, I knew Thomas Hart Benton.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** We used to float on the Buffalo River and we used to see Thomas Hart Benton on the river with other friends of ours. He loved to fish on the Buffalo and that was the river that we all shared a deep love for.

[End of Stop]

## ***Victim of the City Streets #2, John Biggers***

### **A Legacy in Education**

**ALICE WALTON:** John Thomas Biggers is one of the most important of the early twentieth century, African American artists. It's interesting--whether you would consider him a regionalist or not, I think he was influenced by Benton and the regionalists, because he sticks with reality and he often focuses, such as in the painting *Victim of the City Streets [#2]*, on downtrodden African Americans and the very difficult lives that they led, particularly in large metropolitan areas.

Biggers studied at Hampton University, a historic black college in Virginia, under other groundbreaking African American artists--some of my favorites in fact, Charles White and Elizabeth Catlett, who are also in the Crystal Bridges collection.



**ALICE CONTINUES:** Most of his images do depict black mythology, spirituality, and the reality of the position of African Americans in society.

John attended Pennsylvania State University after his time at Hampton, where he earned a PhD in Art Education. He then went on to found the Art Department at Texas Southern University, a historic black college in Houston, and then spent the next 24 years training a new generation of African American artists and teachers. This may be his greatest legacy.

[End of Stop]

## ***Azure Icicle Chandelier, Dale Chihuly***

### **The Merger of Commercial and Fine Art**

**ALICE WALTON:** Let's talk about Dale Chihuly.

[Pause]

He really pioneered the merger of commercial art and fine art, and blurred the lines. He is loved by almost all Americans including myself.

And so one of the great joys for me was when we had the great Chihuly exhibition out in the North Forest, in the fall of '17. And he made several pieces specifically for sites at Crystal Bridges. And one of my favorites is the double chandelier between the two lower bridges.

[Pause]

**ALICE CONTINUES:** We are so proud to actually have five Chihulys in our collection--go out into the North Forest you will see the number one favorite of our community and our members. We decided to let our members vote on which Chihuly they wanted from the show. And the overwhelming favorite, it was the *Fori Boat*. So go take a look at that. But our indoor piece is the beautiful double chandelier.

[End of Stop]

## ***Silver Upper White River, Maya Lin***

### **Inspired by Local Landscape**

**ALICE WALTON:** So welcome to Maya Lin. One of my favorite artists and actually a close personal friend. She's one of the top contemporary artists in the world today. Maya flew into the Northwest Arkansas airport and saw the beautiful streaks of the White River water system. She's very concerned with water and the preservation of water, and this sculpture is about all that. It also denotes the need for conservation and recycling, which we all need to do, since this piece is done from recycled silver.

So when you go along the wall next to the lower pond, you'll see this beautiful silver ribbon that sparkles when the sun dances on that wall.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** And we were so fortunate that she agreed to a commission of the White River water system.

[End of Stop]

# ***Eagle*, Luis Alfonso Jimenez**

## **“Godfather” of Chicano Art**

**ALICE WALTON:** Luis Alfonso Jimenez had an American mother and a Mexican father. And so this fabulous *Eagle* sculpture ties the symbol of freedom in the United States with the history of the Mexican Republic and flag, in the form of the cactus and the rattlesnake.

Luis unfortunately died at an early age when a sculpture, a fiberglass sculpture that he was working on, fell on him and fatally injured him.

Luis is a very famous and well-known artist, and is often referred to as the “Godfather” of Chicano art, a fitting title.

[End of Stop]

## ***Pink Bird Figure II, Helen Frankenthaler***

### **Staining**

**ALICE WALTON:** Another great American woman artist, slightly younger than Joan Mitchell is Helen Frankenthaler. And we actually have five fabulous Frankenthalers. They date from the mid-50s.

We have the beautiful *Pink Bird [Figure II]*.

Frankenthaler developed a new painting technique that had never really been done in Europe or America, and it's called staining. Most artists prime their canvas and Frankenthaler did not prime her canvas. She would then thin her paints with turpentine and stain, not paint the canvas, which was an entirely new technique. Several of her cohorts such as Morris Louis, who you'll see in our galleries, also adopted this technique. But she was the one that really invented it.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** We worked for several years actually, with the Gagosian Gallery and the Frankenthaler estate to get a group of five paintings so that we have a great early abstract, you'll see in the contemporary galleries, a little tougher. And then these beautiful stained canvases that come later.

[End of Stop]



## ***Excerpt (Suprematist evasion), Julie Mehretu***

### **Friction, Color, and Feeling**

**ALICE WALTON:** Julie Mehretu is another favorite artist of mine. She's Ethiopian-born and lives in the US where most of her work has been completed. Julie has her own brand of modern art, contemporary art, and I love the linear nature and the entanglement and the friction in her works. I've gotten to live with this piece in my home for many years, and I hope you will spend some time really just looking at the friction, the color, and feeling where it takes you.

Mehretu's work is particularly related to architecture, and that's all the lines and the linear connectivity, and it's part of what I love so much. She's a highly accomplished, celebrated, and much sought-after American artist of today.

[End of Stop]

## ***Indian Land #4, Fritz Scholder***

### **The Displacement of Native People**

**ALICE WALTON:** Fritz Scholder is one of our great Indigenous artists. He died in 2005, born in '37. He really was at the forefront of the first Native American contemporary art, to be noticed and displayed in museums. This great painting, *Indian Land #4*, is really all about the place of Native America in nature, in the land, owning this country, and the displacement of native people from the very land that they grew up on and that they considered theirs.

His art broke from traditional Indigenous forms, employing both abstraction and gestural painting. Fritz is probably one of the two or three most well-known Indigenous artists from a California tribe, and in '64, he began teaching at the newly formed Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, a hugely influential institution on contemporary Indigenous art.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** Fritz believed and often said that most minorities have a homeland somewhere, a place that's theirs. "The Indian has a homeland that is possessed by another dominant culture." That has psychologically very strange ramifications. If you look at *Indian Land #4*, you can literally feel the displacement in the artwork and the sense of being there, but not necessarily grounded.

[End of Stop]

## ***Untitled, Joan Mitchell***

### **Creating Harmony from Chaos**

**ALICE WALTON:** So if I had to pick top five paintings, I know that Joan Mitchell's great painting from 1952 to '53 would be one of those. And it has a quite an interesting story behind it. So Joan Mitchell is the only woman included in the major Abstract Expressionist artists from the '50s and '60s. She was one tough lady because the Ab Ex group were pretty macho and pretty rough. They all hung out in a bar called the Cedar Tavern, and Joan hung with the best of them.

But I got to live with this great Joan Mitchell in my house for several years until the museum opened. And it's one of the most important paintings in my own life. And I actually, I was asked to give a talk at the University of Arkansas to the graduation class.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** And I picked this painting as the subject of my talk called, “Creating Harmony from Chaos,” because that's what this painting is to me.

I think it's really one of the most beautiful pieces of art I've ever seen. And I can't ever decide if it's a ballet dancer or if it's music or if it's poetry, but it's sheer energy. And I love that about this. Joan Mitchell called these "remembered landscapes." And if you would like a great book on a great artist, I'll give you two ideas. One is the biography on Joan Mitchell, and the other is a little juicier and about five or six of the great women artists of that period called *Ninth Street Women*.

[End of Stop]

## ***Cerulean, Carmen Herrera***

### **Breakfast with Carmen**

**ALICE WALTON:** So I had the joy of getting to meet and have breakfast one Sunday morning in New York with the great artist, Cuban American woman, Carmen Herrera. She was at the time only 104, now 105. We walked up two flights of stairs to her apartment and she had tea for us. We sat at a bench that was obviously her working table and she had another near the window. We sat down at her working table and Braxton, my friend and Crystal Bridges patron that had set up this visit, had tea while Carmen helped herself to her traditional daily breakfast of a jigger of vodka. She's one of the most amazing people I've ever met, with energy, a perspective on life.

Carmen's work, she's painted her whole life. She's an accomplished artist. She never sold a piece of work until she was 87 years old, even though she'd painted her whole life.

So you can think about the difficulty of being a woman artist. It's much more challenging, and a Cuban American woman artist possibly made it even more challenging. But I think that this great diagonal triangular piece, which is really only a square turned on its ear, is one of our best pieces at Crystal Bridges. And Carmen is the epitome of the long, difficult, and lonely road of so many artists, but she's a great woman and has had a great impact on the art world.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** After 45 minutes visiting with Carmen and learning about her life, she not really politely--much more directly actually--invited Braxton and I to leave so she could get back to work.

[End of Stop]



## ***Cerulean, Carmen Herrera***

### **The Space Between**

**ALICE WALTON:** So I've thought many years about, what is the definition of art. And I hadn't ever heard one that [pause] touched me that I could own. And I finally decided that for me the definition of art, is the space between.

Because it is the visceral and emotional and physical and mental and spiritual reaction that I have when I see a great piece of art that creates that special bond and meaning in my life. So one of the things that have as a culture at Crystal Bridges because of that view of art is that we don't want any more art than we have to have for conservation reasons in storage.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** As a result of that, we have a policy of trying to lend as much work as we can out if it's not on our wall so that someone is always enjoying it.

[End of Stop]

# ***Night Zag Wall, Louise Nevelson***

## **An Acceptance**

**ALICE WALTON:** So here we go with another great woman artist and a strong woman. Louise Nevelson who lived from 1899 to 1988--wow. That's pretty impressive, isn't it? We have her famous *Night Zag Wall* which was done between '69 and '74. Louise's father was a spare parts junk dealer, so to speak. And so she grew up with kind of a junk yard or a spare parts of all types place in her backyard, which is I think how she started out working from that yard and then progressing into things such as *Night Zag Wall*.

I do love Louise's quote, "when I fell in love with black, it contained all color. It wasn't a negation of color. It was an acceptance." And that is one of my favorite quotes.

[End of Stop]

## ***Untitled (S.028, Hanging Four-Lobed Continuous Form within a Form), Ruth Asawa***

### **A Spiritual Connection**

**ALICE WALTON:** So one of my favorite artists--I say that way too often, don't I? But they are! [Laughs]

One of my favorite artists is Ruth Asawa. Ruth is a Japanese American. She grew up in California during World War II. As was the sad story with so many of our Japanese American Citizens, she was brought to Arkansas along with her family, her brothers and sisters and mom and dad, and they were put in one of the confinement camps.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** But the beauty of Ruth is that she never said a negative word about her confinement here, and in fact, one of the prison guards in Arkansas befriended Ruth and encouraged her to make some art from the excess wire around the camp. And that was the beginning of her art career.

[Pause]

So I loved her Arkansas connections and I just felt a spiritual connection with her art.

[End of Stop]

## ***The Reader, Emma Amos***

### **Integration of Abstract and Portraiture**

**ALICE WALTON:** The beautiful painting, *The Reader*, is by a great artist named Emma Amos, who passed away in May, 2020 from complications of Alzheimer's. This painting was done in 1967, and is really one of her great early exploratory paintings, which she called attitude paintings.

When I first saw this painting, I was a little disturbed, and I couldn't figure out why. But the reality is, it shows a self-portrait actually of Emma reading a book, but it feels unfinished. [pause] It's not. The reality is it is an integration of abstract techniques with portraiture and makes it a very interesting multi-dimensional painting--but to me, it always has a friction about it.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** Amos was prominent as an artist. She's African American. She grew up during the period of the feminist movement, and she was often at odds with feminism, because she felt the movement did not represent or fairly reflect the experiences of black women. And I'd never thought of that really, until I read this about Emma. The feminist movement did not really encompass much focus other than white women.

Emma was also a great educator and grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. She was very well educated. She had three degrees and taught at Rutgers University in New Jersey. She was a powerful force in the New York art scene throughout her career.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** She did experience racism and sexism in the art world, and she drew on her own living experiences and African American culture in her work.

[End of Stop]



# ***Portrait of a Florentine Nobleman, Kehinde Wiley***

## **Historical Elements with a Twist**

**ALICE WALTON:** I love *Portrait of a Florentine Nobleman*, and I love the title because you go, "What?" Kehinde Wiley is a fabulous African American artist and very hot on the contemporary scene, but he takes traditional fabric, traditional art, historically correct scenes and titles, and then surprises you in planting a very vibrant, colorful, strong, powerful African American female.

*Portrait of a Florentine Nobleman* was inspired by the 2014 death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and the attending riots and protests which ensued. The painting features Shontay Haynes of St. Louis, Missouri.

[End of Stop]

***Artist Considers the 21st Century Implications of  
Psychosis as Public Health Crisis or, Critical/Comedic  
Analysis into the Pathophysiology of Psychosis,***  
**Vanessa German**

**Social Art**

**ALICE WALTON:** So when I walked through the first *State of the Art* in 2014, I got to the middle of the Contemporary Gallery and I started crying. There were four or five sculptures of young African American children. They were dolls that were white dolls that were then painted to be black dolls. And I have never, I don't think, before or since been so moved by a piece of art. Well that artist is Vanessa German, and Vanessa has become a dear friend. She's come to speak and perform at Crystal Bridges and in Bentonville several times since. She also received the great honor of being the second recipient of the Don Tyson prize, which is the largest prize in American art, which we award through the generosity of Tyson Foods and the Tyson family each year.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** Vanessa lives in Homewood, which is a suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and happens to have or used to have the distinction of having the highest child murder rate in the United States, of any area, which is a very sad distinction. Vanessa decided she was going to do something about it. So she started gathering the children in her neighborhood, first on her porch to help make these works of art, and then she bought a dilapidated building from a bank that had it in for foreclosure. And she invited the children in as soon as they finish school to keep them off the streets and keep them safe, and to learn to do art.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** And this has been Vanessa's life. So she really is a leader in a whole movement called social art in which these artists--really, their art is all about changing their neighborhoods and doing things, creating things that have a major positive impact on their neighborhoods. And there is no better example than Vanessa German's great sculptures.

[End of Stop]

# Precious Jewels by the Sea, Amy Sherald

## A Crowd Pleaser

**ALICE WALTON:** This fabulous painting, *Precious Jewels by the Sea* by Amy Sherald, is a crowd pleaser and I believe, one of her very best works. Amy is a young, African American artist. You might best know her as the artist that painted Michelle Obama's portrait in the National Gallery. We think this is of equal importance and we are proud to have it in the Crystal Bridges collection. This painting and most of her other works are about expressions of freedom. I like that.

[End of Stop]

## Dr. Compton's Letter Rack, David Esterly

### A Fabulous Commission

**ALICE WALTON:** So one of our most important recent acquisitions is a fabulous commission by a great artist. That was in our first *State of the Art*, David Esterly.

This is really an icon in American art, in my opinion and reminiscent of a great, great man in Bentonville's history, Dr. Neal Compton, who was our family doctor.

If you look in the etchings there on the paper you'll see myself and my brothers listed. And it's so funny because I was only charged a dollar 20 to see Neal. My brothers were charged a dollar 80 [laughter].

Neal was one of our great conservationists and is credited with helping create and pass the National Scenic Rivers Act which saved the beautiful Buffalo River that Neal, my family, Thomas Hart Benton, and many others in our region love and cherish.

So you might be interested in looking up--CBS Sunday Morning did a special on David Esterly and this commission, this fabulous sculpture.

But David developed ALS which is a very devastating disease and attacks the nervous system. When we commissioned David, he spent two years on this piece and it is his final masterpiece. He died about two weeks after finishing the piece.

[End of Stop]

# ***Our Town, Kerry James Marshall***

## **Falling in Love with the Unknown**

**ALICE WALTON:** You know, when I first started reading the art history books, I started with artists in the mid-1800s and worked my way forward. So contemporary artists are really the last thing that I've studied. And I've just learned as we've gone. Crystal Bridges has always incorporated contemporary art in our collection and have from day one. But because of my lack of education on the contemporary side and the early American background of most of our curators and advisers in the early days, we really didn't focus on the contemporary side until 2009 when Don Bacigalupi came aboard.

So I was with Don and it was a Christie's auction and we were going around looking at the pieces that were going to be in the sale.



**ALICE CONTINUES:** And I come around a corner and I see this most amazing painting called *Our Town* from 1999 by an artist named Kerry James Marshall. One of the joys of art is that you don't have to know anything to fall in love. And I immediately fell in love with this painting. I did not know who Kerry James Marshall was. And I said, "Don, I don't know who he is, but we have to get this." [laughter] Don agreed. That was great. He knew who Kerry James Marshall was.

The Kerry James Marshall has been the most requested loan by other museums in our collection. It is one of his most iconic works. There's so much to look at in this painting, and I see new things every time I look. It's not just about an African American neighborhood and young children.

**ALICE CONTINUES:** It's about the war and all the disengagement and engagement that happens in a neighborhood.

[End of Stop]

## Conclusion

### To Live with Art

The paintings that I own personally and I've gotten to live with are almost all promised gifts to Crystal Bridges. And when they want to borrow I lend. And when other people want to borrow, I lend. And it really is exciting to get to lend these pieces out. But it's meant so much to me to be able to live with these pieces. To live with a piece of art is a really interesting process. And what you think about a piece of art changes in many complex ways over time. I would encourage those of you that are interested in finding something you love, learning about it, seeing how it fits into the history and politics and culture, and then living with it.

[End of Stop]