

# HYPERALLERGIC

News

## Wake Forest Students Select Works by Salman Toor and Zanele Muholi for School's Art Collection

In 1962, the Student Union voted to establish an art collection, which advanced the creation of a dedicated art department.

By Cassie Packard May 13, 2021

In the early 1960s, Wake Forest University (WFU), a private university in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, embarked upon an experiment. In 1962, the Student Union voted to establish an art collection with hopes that it would lead to the creation of a dedicated art department. The following year, a small committee of students headed to New York City with cobbled-together funds and proceeded to painstakingly select and purchase contemporary work from the city's art galleries. They started with a 1957 color linoleum cut by Pablo Picasso and went from there.

Every four years since that first trip in 1963, a small group of student ambassadors at WFU has visited New York City galleries to acquire work for the collection. Today, the Student Union Collection of Contemporary Art features over 200 works across media by more than 100 artists, including Glenn Ligon, Louise Nevelson, and Shirin Neshat.

The Student Union just announced nine new acquisitions, including works by Zanele Muholi, Betty Tompkins, and Willie Cole. Restricted travel prevented the students from traveling to New York City to look at the work in person, so they instead paid virtual visits to 16 galleries spread across New York City, Los

Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, Denver, and Detroit. Their budget was \$100,000.

“The only criteria given was to reflect the times in some capacity,” said Lynn Huffard in a statement released by the school that included the students’ ruminations on their selections. “We were interested in choosing works that told a diverse array of narratives, and wanted the mediums of the pieces themselves to be diverse as well,” Huffard added. In their presentations, the students spoke about Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and the pandemic as threads that run through the works.

The new additions to the collection include Martine Gutierrez’s “Queer Rage, Don’t touch the art,” from the Brooklyn-based artist’s 2018 *Indigenous Woman* magazine. The project consists of a 124-page fashion magazine that put Gutierrez, a trans artist of Mayan heritage, at its center in a “celebration of Mayan Indian heritage, the navigation of contemporary indigeneity and the ever-evolving self-image.”

“Queer Rage, Don’t touch the art” depicts the artist in a fluorescent dress occupying the hallowed space of the museum, leaning a blue-painted arm against a classical bust. Gutierrez will be the subject of an exhibition at the Whitney Museum this September.

The Student Union also acquired Salman Toor’s 2020 oil painting “The Meeting,” which depicts the erotically charged meeting of two men at a party. The artist, who was born in Lahore and lives in New York City, is known for his paintings of queer brown men, which incorporate Western art historical tropes — in this instance, the Renaissance tondo and the Impressionist bar scene. Speaking about the green hue that characterizes Toor’s nighttime settings, student Amy Dyckman says: “For him, the green refers to Islam, absinthe, an oasis, poison, and Slytherin.”

CRISTIN TIERNEY



Jorge Tacla, "May 25, 2020" (2020), Oil and Cold Wax on Canvas (© Jorge Tacla. Student Union Collection of Contemporary Art, Wake Forest University)

The 2021 acquisitions, which also feature pieces by Ramiro Gomez, Jorge Tacla, Rashaun Rucker, and Suchitra Mattai, will be exhibited in the university's Hanes Art Gallery this fall.