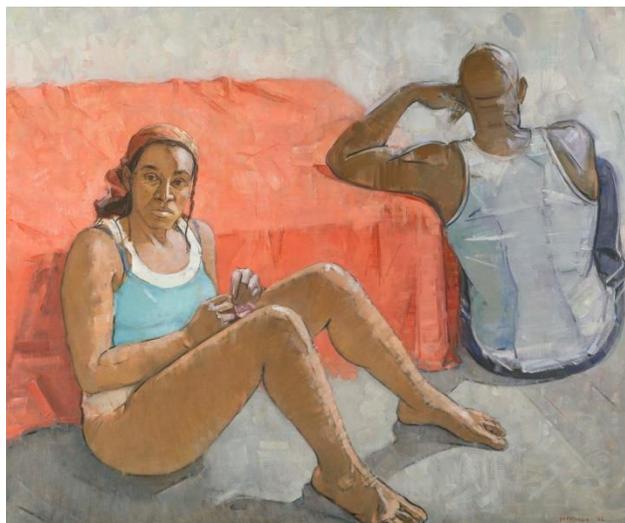


OBJECT of the **month**

December 2020



BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

Hello, I'm Violette-Anne, a Museum Guide at the Dayton Art Institute. In this presentation we will be studying a recent acquisition, *Couple (Amina and Maurise)*, painted in 2006, by Ohio-born artist Mary Beth McKenzie, who lives and works in New York.

When looking at this large painting, which is about 4 by 5 feet, what catches your eyes at first glance? For me, it is actually 2 things simultaneously: the extensive color planes, with the coral bed cover and the white-ish grey all around the subjects, and the unusual positions of the figures, with one turning his back to the other and to the viewer. Can you tell that the artist is excited by color and sculptural form?

First, let's see what we can discover in looking closely at the colors. The female figure, Amina, visually connects with the bed through the color of her bandana, which blends with the bed cover, and through her turquoise shirt, which is a complementary color to the orange behind her. Even the paint used for her skin has some touches of a pale coral. On the other hand, the colors used for Maurise, the male figure, form quite a contrast to the bed with the rich brown of his skin, the dark blue of his pants, and the large block of white of his shirt. Could the interaction of these colors imply that this is not his bed? And yet, his left arm firmly connects him to it.

Secondly, let's look at the forms. Maurise is turning his body away from both Amina and the viewer, so we can only guess how he feels. Does the position of his head resting on his bent arm lead you to an answer? Amina is facing the viewer, exposing her emotional state by the way she appears to be staring into space, the nervousness of her hands holding what might be her undergarments, and literally by her nakedness from the waist down.

Now, let's take a step back and observe the painting as a whole. What impressions do you have of the scene? There is a lot of negative space, which is the space around the subjects of an image. The use of a palette knife, which adds thick swatches of paint in contrast to the soft blending of a brush, gives a palpable heaviness to the air surrounding the figures. I feel that weight also in the hearts of the couple who seem unable to communicate to clear that air.

Mary Beth McKenzie believes in working directly from life as she is concerned with the character or spirit of the people she is painting. When she starts a painting, she doesn't know how she wants it to come out or what she wants to say. She lets the painting dictate where it will go. Interestingly, for this particular artwork, something very unusual happened: the artist had to find a new male model at the

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last minute and the two models were unable to do a sitting together due to scheduling conflicts. Instead, the artist had to paint them separately, relying on tape marks for placement. It was a very difficult undertaking because she trusts her direct interactions with the subjects to guide her paintings. Could the palpable sense of alienation between the two figures come from the artist's own sense of disconnection from a lack of synchronous presence?

This piece, which can be seen in gallery 201, is one of three double-portrait paintings generously donated to the Dayton Art Institute by the artist. I will leave you with the artist's wish for the viewers: "I hope that when you see my work, you see life as I see it: unclouded by agenda, moment by moment, and one stroke at a time." Thank you for joining me in exploring a part of the DAI's collection.

END TRANSCRIPT

Click [here](#) for full multimedia presentation.

RESOURCES

www.youtube.com

www.theartstudentsleague.org

www.arthur.io

www.metmuseum.org

ARTWORKS FEATURED IN VIDEO

[Mary Beth McKenzie \(American, b. 1946\), *Couple \(Amina and Maurise\)*, 2006, oil on canvas. Gift of the artist. 2018.18. Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, OH](#)

[Mary Beth McKenzie \(American, b. 1946\), *Self Portrait \(Life Masks\)*, 1993, oil on canvas. National Academy Museum, New York, NY](#)

[Mary Beth McKenzie \(American, b. 1946\), *Couple \(Bob and Richard\)*, 2002, oil on canvas. Gift of the artist. 2018.19. Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, OH](#)

[Mary Beth McKenzie \(American, b. 1946\), *Couple \(Mark and Luc\)*, 1997, oil on canvas. Gift of the artist. 2019.5. Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, OH](#)

IMAGE CREDITS

www.marybethmckenzie.com

www.youtube.com

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