

ARTnews

Collector to Watch: Charles Boyd Creates a 'Link to the Past' with His Expanding Holdings

BY KATE DWYER

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Charles

Boyd.

COURTESY CHARLES BOYD

When he was a pre-med student at Howard University in Washington, D.C., Charles Boyd said, he didn't have time for much else; his life was "science, science, science." But an art appreciation class on African-American art in 1987 changed the course of his life, ultimately inspiring him to build a formidable collection of historical and contemporary art.

"I've always loved art, loved beauty," the Michigan-based plastic surgeon and entrepreneur said. He made his first acquisition in the late 1990s, when he purchased an African carving while visiting the Côte d'Ivoire. When his father passed away in 2004, Boyd inherited pieces by Romare Bearden and local L.A. artists; he started seriously collecting five years later. Given his professional interest in faces, he said he was drawn to portraiture, from Eddie Martinez's heavily populated, graffiti-influenced paintings to composite faces in Nathaniel Mary Quinn's canvases, like 2017's *I Wish a Muthafucka Would*.



Among the works on display in Charles Boyd's Detroit home is *Drawing the Blinds* (2014) by Titus Kaphar. PHOTO JEREMY LAWSON/©TITUS KAPHAR/COURTESY THE ARTIST

“I was really just looking at the aesthetics and how we look at aesthetics, how we look at beauty, how we look at images, and whether they’re beautiful or grotesque or sad,” Boyd said.

Today, his collection is a mix of artists from different generations and includes pieces by Elizabeth Catlett, Kerry James Marshall, Ming Smith, Kenneth Victor Young, Titus Kaphar, Eddie Martinez, Deborah Roberts, and Sanford Biggers. Black artists and those from the African diaspora compose about 75 percent of his collection. “The thing I enjoy most is meeting with the artists,” he said. During studio visits, he always asks about their influences. “And that got me looking at more historical artists,” including Catlett. Boyd thinks of his collection as “a link to the past.”

He is also an active patron in the museum world, serving as a board member of the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, the Detroit Institute of Arts, and the Studio Museum in Harlem, and a trustee for his alma mater, Howard, where he heads up the board’s art committee, which stewards the school’s 4,000-work art collection.

“We’re looking at reintroducing these works to the world because most of them have not been seen recently,” Boyd said of his work at Howard. By way of example, the committee lent Charles White’s mural *Five Great American Negroes* (1939–40) to the Museum of Modern Art in New York for its 2018 exhibition “Charles White: A Retrospective.” “To come back to Howard in a different position—being on the board and trying to help be the caretaker of this important collection—is definitely very meaningful in my life,” he said.