

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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PHILADELPHIA (September 1, 2015)—La Salle University Art Museum is pleased to present the exhibitions **Theodore A. Harris: *Collage and Conflict*** and **Julius Bloch: *Drawings and Prints***, on view September 30 through December 4, 2015. Opening reception, Wednesday, September 30, 5–7 p.m. Artist’s talk immediately preceding at 4 p.m.

Theodore A. Harris: Collage and Conflict*

This exhibition will feature 19 collage artworks by Philadelphia-based artist Theodore A. Harris, including original triptychs from the *Collage and Conflict* series as well as original artwork made for reproduction on book and journal covers.

The following text written by curator Dr. Klare Scarborough is excerpted from the exhibition brochure:

Theodore A. Harris defines himself as a “confrontational collagist, engaged in visual warfare, decolonizing the mind through collage.” He uses images of the US Capitol dome, credit cards, and slave irons to raise questions about systems of social and political oppression, including imperialism, capitalism, and racism. Art historian Dennis Raverty has described Harris’s work as “highly-charged, brutally-confrontational and unsparingly critical, with a rhetorical quality that is almost Baroque in intensity.” While conveying complex political messages, his collages are also aesthetically beautiful, with surfaces marked by the gestural violence of his creative process. In his melding of content and aesthetics, Harris engages viewers with critical questions about systems of institutional power—questions that resonate on intellectual, associative and visual levels. I have had several conversations with Harris, during which he spoke at length about his work and his artistic goals.

Harris has been making collage and process-based work since around 1986. He has worked with the Philadelphia Anti-Graffiti Network and the development of the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program. He has also taught visual art and poetry at the Hammonds House Museum in Atlanta and elsewhere. Since 1998 he has exhibited his works at museums and educational institutions across the US and internationally. From 2006 to 2010 he worked on mixed media series of triptychs entitled *Collage and Conflict*. He has since then produced a series called *Facts on the Ground*, and a recent digital project called *Conscientious Objector to Formalism*.

Harris weaves together images and words from various sources, including popular advertisements, military journals, and literary works, creating intertextual artworks that call upon viewers’ knowledge and recognition of images, symbols and words. He also inverts some of the images, turning visual symbols and their meanings upside down, and manipulates their orientation in relation to other images and also the viewer. This strategy amplifies the visual interaction of signs and symbols on the surface of the artwork, requiring viewers to make thoughtful connections between disparate images, reversed symbols, and poetic texts, in relation to their own knowledge about politics and contemporary events. While some of Harris’s juxtapositions and inversions are easily readable, others require careful consideration to fully understand the visual operations of his collages. Thus, viewers interpret these artworks in relation to a complex network of texts, both within artworks themselves and in reference to other cultural texts, including real life experiences and personal political sentiments.

This intertextuality is also significant aspect of Harris's professional artistic practices and his communication strategies. He has published his collages on the covers of scholarly and political publications such as *African American Review*, *Theatre Journal*, and *Exceptional Violence: Embodied Citizenship in Transnational Jamaica* (2011); and black poetry anthologies such as *Dance the Guns to Silence* (2005). In 2002 Harris exhibited his original collages paired with poetry written by the late New Jersey Poet Laureate Amiri Baraka in response to his artwork. Harris's collages and Baraka's poems were also featured together in a collaborative book entitled *Our Flesh of Flames* (2008). Additionally, Harris has written and published his own poetry in various literary journals and books. Working in his preferred medium of collage, which inherently lends itself to intertextual communication, Harris maximizes collage's potential for creating complex multi-faceted artworks.

Theodore A. Harris: Artist Statement

The following text is excerpted from "Collage and Conflict: A Triptych Manifesto," published in *Left Curve*, no. 35 (2011), pages 60-61.

As an artist I create work to act as a lobbyist for liberation not to hold up oppressive regimes and an oligarchy that resolves conflict with sanctions and nooses of war; entering into a konkordat with the church that put silencers on crucifixion nails. The existence of Arlington National Cemetery and the prison industrial complex is evidence enough the scales of justice are not blind and even, those graves are not filled with blue bloods but fresh with our dead, the working poor in this country, deployed to go off and kill the working poor in another country like drones. This is proof the business class only sees life through the narrow profit margin eyeglasses of mercantilism. It is with these conclusions I see war as a map of wounds; turning flesh and bones into glue. This is the reason the protagonist in my confrontational collages are inverted images of the US Capitol and Pentagon buildings, intended to be read as an invective critique of blind patriotism.

Theodore A. Harris may be contacted at artasaweapon4@gmail.com for interviews and more information about his work.

Julius Bloch: Drawings and Prints

This exhibition will feature 13 original drawings and prints by Julius Bloch.

Julius Bloch was a prominent Jewish, German-born artist who immigrated to Philadelphia with his family in 1893. He studied at the Pennsylvania Museum and School (now known as the University of the Arts.) He became an important social realist artist known for his sympathetic depictions of working class people, particularly African American men. During the Great Depression, he worked for the Federal Art Project and received national attention for his portrayals of poor and oppressed groups of people. He became an instructor at PAFA in 1948. His work has been featured in numerous exhibitions, including a major retrospective at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1983.

The Julius Bloch exhibition is presented in partnership with The Print Center 100: <http://printcenter.org/100/the-print-center-100-2/>

Public Programs

In conjunction with these exhibitions, La Salle University Art Museum is presenting the following public programs:

Wednesday, September 30, 4-5 pm, Artist's Talk

Wednesday, September 30, 5-7 pm, Opening Reception

Wednesday, October 28, 6-7 pm, "Abolition's First Lady: Unveiling Anna Murray Douglass," a poetry reading by M. Nzadi Keita, Associate Professor of English & Creative Writing, Ursinus College.

Friday, November 13, 1-2 pm, "Ennobling Working People: Julius Bloch and New Deal Art", a public lecture by Dr. Sharon Musher, Associate Professor of History, Stockton University.

Supporters of the exhibitions and related programs include the Philadelphia Cultural Fund; the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts; the Brother Daniel Burke Endowment Fund; the Art Angels; and La Salle University's Departments of Fine Arts, Social Work, American Studies, the Multicultural and International Center, the Greater Philadelphia Initiative, and the Explorer Connection.

The La Salle University Art Museum is located on the lower level of Olney Hall on the campus of La Salle University at 19th Street and Olney Avenue. Fall Schedule is Monday through Friday, call or check the website for hours. Admission is free, though donations are accepted. Please call to schedule group visits. Special tours can be arranged. For further information call 215.951.1221 or visit the website at <http://www.lasalle.edu/museum/>. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.