

Absence

Seeing and Unseeing the Fleming's Collection

In 2020, we began to dismantle our European/American Gallery in a transparent and public process, as part of The Fleming Reimagined. This fall, you will see changes that have taken place in the past year as Fleming staff, together with UVM faculty and students, have begun to reckon with the Fleming's institutional and collections history. We make our work visible in this gallery and elsewhere in the Museum through our Absences project, as we confront the problematic histories behind the collections and, with your input, rethink what we collect and how we display it, and the words that accompany it.

On a profound level, the Fleming's history, its collections, and its white curatorial perspectives over the past ninety years have perpetuated the legacy of white supremacy established by the Fleming's first director and curator, a zoologist who founded the Eugenics Survey of Vermont. The Fleming's European and American art collection, and its display in this gallery, focus overwhelmingly on the work of white male artists depicting white subjects, their possessions, histories, and mythologies. The racism and colonialism that shaped the Museum remains embedded in our permanent collection, and in the ways we have continued to present the collection in our galleries.

We look forward to continuing this public reckoning and we invite your participation as we ask questions to help reimagine the Fleming Museum. What values ought to be displayed? What should we collect and exhibit? What stories about artworks do you want to hear? From what perspectives and in whose voices?

-JANIE COHEN, Director
(organized this gallery in 2000, as Curator)