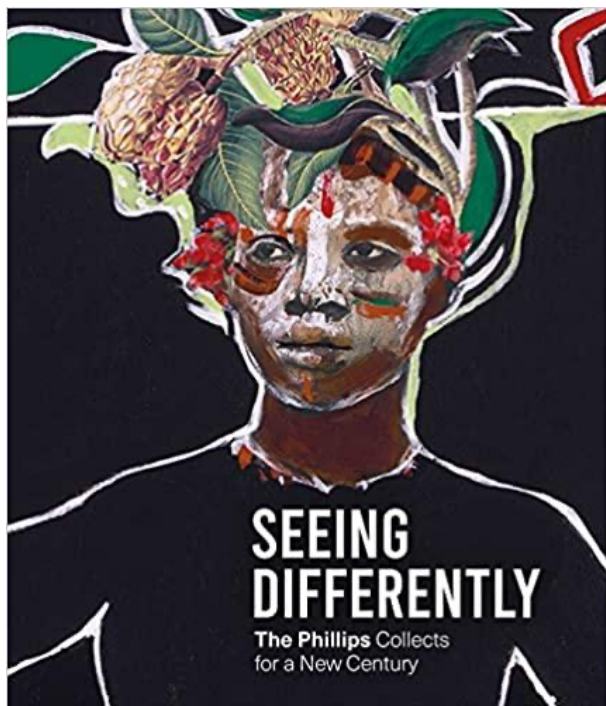


Seeing Differently: the Phillips Collects for a New Century

edited by Elsa Smithgall. D. Giles, February 2021. 360 p. ill. ISBN 9781911282761 (h/c), \$49.95.

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Seeing Differently is the catalog for the Phillips Collection's 100th anniversary exhibition. Founded in 1921 by Duncan Phillips as a memorial to his recently deceased father and a brother who died in the 1918 influenza pandemic, the Washington, DC museum bills itself as the first American museum of modern art. The catalog, edited by senior curator Elsa Smithgall, notes the "bizarre symmetry" between the genesis of the museum and the lead up to its centenary year, beginning with the gallery's shuttering due to another pandemic.

In fact, the entire catalog seems to argue that the museum's history is a study in continuity: that the values espoused by Phillips himself have been maintained through its century of existence and that

recent initiatives--most prominently the museum's focus on diversifying its collection--are changes not of substance but of degree. The catalog demonstrates that Phillips's major philosophies, such as hanging works not by period, genre, or nationality but in conversation with one another; support of living artists regardless of race or origin; and the view of art as a benefit to society continue to be driving forces of the museum.

Fourteen essays alternate between explorations of the museum's history and collecting areas, interpretations of new or old acquisitions, and perspectives on themes like color or music. Interspersed with the essays are four "conversations" between Phillips Collection curators and artists with personal connections to the museum. The essays are not all academic; rather they include reflections from artists, poets, and others. In fact, the text (including catalog entries)

was written by a total of forty-eight contributors with diverse backgrounds and vocations. One gets the sense that the catalog has been arranged like artworks at the museum: the juxtaposing formats and subject matter create fruitful connections in the mind of the reader.

The book is printed on high quality, glossy paper with eye-catching endpapers representing works in the exhibition. Essays are generously illustrated and there are 203 plates (forty-nine with object entries), as well as an appendix with exhibition and publication history of the Phillips. While there is no bibliography, each essay contains footnotes and there is also an index. Background knowledge of modern and contemporary art would be helpful for readers, but the text is generally accessible and free from academic jargon. This catalog is highly recommended for libraries supporting undergraduate or graduate programs in art, art history, or museum studies. The catalog's focus on amplifying marginalized voices and the museum's self-described commitment to challenging the system of white supremacy (while noting its first Black curator was hired in 2020) may widen its appeal to those interested in how historic institutions are addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the twenty-first century.