

BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Blanton Museum of Art to Present *Day Jobs*



Violette Bule, *Dream America*, 2015

***The first major exhibition to examine the impact of an artist's day job
on their artistic practice opens February 19, 2023***

Austin, TX—February 6, 2023—The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas in Austin is pleased to present *Day Jobs*, the first major exhibition to examine the overlooked impact of day jobs on the visual arts. Opening February 19, 2023, the exhibition will feature more than 95 works by 38 established and emerging artists based in the United States.

“We’re excited to present such an original exhibition built around artists’ own stories and the unique paths that encouraged their artistic careers,” said Blanton director Simone Wicha. “Bringing together a diverse group of artists that are connected by something as universal as work, *Day Jobs* sheds light on how their creative endeavors have been inspired and shaped by tasks, roles, and observations at jobs often held to earn a living and seemingly unrelated to their artistic practices. This timely exhibition invites us to rethink how we view creativity and success, and to reflect on our own relationships with work and the unexpected, everyday places we find inspiration.”

Success for artists is often measured by the ability to quit their day jobs and focus full time on art production. Yet other employment, even if it is unrelated to the artist's practice, is not always an impediment to an artist's career. This exhibition illuminates how day jobs can spur creative growth by providing artists with unexpected new materials and methods; working knowledge of a specific industry that becomes an area of artistic investigation; or a predictable structure that opens space for unpredictable ideas.

Curated by Veronica Roberts, former curator of modern and contemporary art at the Blanton, with Lynne Maphies, former curatorial assistant, *Day Jobs* features artists that have been employed in all manner of part- and full-time roles, including as dishwasher, furniture maker, graphic designer, hairstylist, ICU nurse, lawyer, and nanny, and in several cases, served as employees of large companies like Ford Motors, H-E-B Grocery, and IKEA. The exhibition is consequently organized in seven sections, based on job sectors: "Art World," "Service Industry," "Media and Advertising," "Fashion and Design," "Caregivers," and "Finance, Technology, and Law."

"The idea for *Day Jobs* came from the culmination of artists' stories, so many of whom graciously shared with me how deeply influential their day jobs were," said exhibition curator Roberts, now the John and Jill Freidenrich Director at the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University. "Artists are some of the hardest-working people I know, but I am struck by how misunderstood they often are and conceived this show to dispel the misguided myths of the starving artist or the romanticized artist struck by a dramatic epiphany. At the core of the exhibition is a desire to acknowledge the precarious and generative ways that art and economic pursuits are intertwined. By including works by both well-known and lesser-known artists, I hope that visitors see artists they know and love in new light, and, at the same time, are introduced to artists they've never seen before."

Conversations with artists fueled Roberts' inspiration for the exhibition and illuminated the often overlooked—in institutional settings and art historical scholarship alike—relationship between artistic labor and economic labor. Roberts' first conversation to this effect was with **Sol LeWitt**, who reflected on his time as a receptionist at the Museum of Modern Art as one of the most instructive experiences of his life. This is where the exhibition begins, with the historical nucleus of artists that worked at MoMA in the 1950s and 1960s.

Art World

The first section of the exhibition includes MoMA employees and artists of LeWitt's generation **Dan Flavin** (elevator operator), **Robert Ryman** (security guard), and **Robert Mangold** (security guard and library employee). This group of artists was deeply impacted by the exchange of ideas, both personally and artistically. For example, Flavin's pyramidal construction of white fluorescent tubes, *Monument for V. Tatlin* (1974), was inspired by a book he was reading about the Russian Avant-Garde, which LeWitt gave him when they crossed paths on the job. Paired with a selection of untitled white paintings by Ryman, a LeWitt wall drawing, and a two-panel Mangold painting, these works reveal the reductive visual vocabulary they forged. Notably, during their period of employment at MoMA, the artists all

began to explore the use of pared-down materials and conceptual art strategies in the creation of serialized work. This section introduces a central conceit of *Day Jobs*—art does not emerge from a vacuum but is a rich interplay of ideas and experiences.

The section continues with artists who likewise worked in the art world. However, for this latter group of artists, access to museum collections, archives, and art-related materials such as frames and crates, was particularly impactful. Included is work by a former frame shop technician (**Larry Bell**), a member of MoMA's curatorial staff (**Howardena Pindell**), a freelance art handler (**Manuel Rodríguez-Delgado**), a member of the Getty Museum's education department (**Sandy Rodriguez**), and a freelance museum educator (**Fred Wilson**).



Fred Wilson, *Grey Area (Brown version)*, 1993

Some of the connections between employment and artistic practice are ideological or conceptual. For example, Wilson's extended time in museums influenced his engagement with institutional critique. Others are more materially based: Pindell's full-time job as a curatorial assistant, and later associate curator, meant that she lost access to daily natural light and had to abandon the figurative painting practice she developed in Yale's MFA program. She turned her attention to materials and processes that could be experimented with after hours. Taking home discarded file folders, paper, and mat board scraps—the very hallmarks of a museum desk job—Pindell attached the pieces created by a hole puncher to unstretched canvas that she sewed together in pieces. The result, *Autobiography: Japan (Mountain Reflection)* 1982–3, transforms these quotidian office materials into a striking, large-scale abstraction.

Service Industry

The exhibition's third section is the broadest, in terms of the range of jobs, but also their influence on artistic practice. This section features the work of **Allan McCollum** (meal preparer for TWA flights, art handler, baker, office cleaner, museum guard), **Gregory Blackstock** (dishwasher), **Violette Blue** (server), **Tom Kiefer** (janitor, U.S. Customs and Border Protection), **Frank Stella** (house and boat painter), **Julia Scher** (cleaning and security system services for women), **Ricardo Valverde** (water meter reader), and **Mathew Angelo Harrison** (product developer, Ford Motor Company).



Frank Stella, *Miniature Benjamin Moore Series*, 1962

Kiefer worked part-time as a janitor at U.S. Customs and Border Protection in Arizona and his resulting photographs of neatly arranged personal belongings confiscated from detained migrants—wallets, water bottles, and rubber duckies—shed light on the dehumanizing immigrant experience. Similarly, Blue addresses her own experience as a Venezuelan immigrant in the U.S. and the often-unseen individuals who work multiple jobs to make ends meet. In her *American Dream*, a colleague at the bakery where she worked holds large stack of plates on her shoulders and, in a diptych, the American flag.

Media and Advertising

While some artists pose a critique of the industries in which they are employed via their artwork, others discover new materials and strategies through their day jobs that bleed into their artistic practices. The latter is true for many artists working in the fields of Media and Advertising, such as **Barbara Kruger** (lead designer, Condé Nast), **Gretchen Bender** (commercial film editor and director), **Marsha Cottrell** (production designer, Condé Nast), **Chuck Ramirez** (graphic designer, H-E-B Grocery), **Andy Warhol** (commercial illustrator), and **James Rosenquist** (billboard painter).



Chuck Ramirez, *Whatacup*, 2002/2014

Ramirez infuses the visual language of everyday items with unexpected poignancy. *Whatacup* (2002/2014) riffs on the recognizable cups from Texas's beloved Whataburger chain, blowing up the design in a life-size six-foot photograph that focuses on the element of the packaging that makes a humble request of its consumers: "When I'm empty please dispose of me properly." Here, the commercial product has become a poignant self-portrait and reference to the artist's own HIV-positive status.

Fashion and Design

More artists who discovered new materials through their day jobs are those hailing from the worlds of Fashion and Design, such as **Emma Amos** (assistant to textile artist Dorothy Liebes), **Richard Artschwager** (furniture maker), **Genesis Belanger** (prop stylist assistant), **Mark Bradford** (hair stylist), and **Jeffrey Gibson** (visual merchandiser, IKEA). Many of the artists in this section also gained a heightened awareness about how to maximize the dramatic presentation of objects.



Genesis Belanger, *Stepford Wife / Sister Wife*, 2018

The endpapers Bradford used as a hairstylist serve as the foundation for many of his early large-scale paintings, such as *Same Ol' Pimp* (2002). Belanger's day job helped her articulate her voice and identify the kind of work that she'd like to make. Regularly scouring New York City for eclectic items to accentuate photo shoots for magazine and fashion labels, she encountered a diverse array of unconventional materials and learned to make any kind of prop that might be needed. Working as an assistant to a prop stylist offered Belanger, as she expressed, "a backstage pass to how the most powerful images in our culture are made."

Caregivers

The economics of care is typically under-acknowledged, but *Day Jobs* seeks to rectify this with a section that highlights the crucial work done by mothers (**Lenka Clayton**), nannies (**Vivian Maier**, **Jay Lynn Gomez**), and nurses (**Nate Lewis**).



Jay Lynn Gomez, *Self-Portrait*, 2013

A series of five collages made by Gomez during her time as a nanny for a family in West Hollywood, California, articulates the ethnic and class distinctions that are endemic to such a relationship, wherein immigrant laborers—and Mexican Americans like Gomez—routinely serve as the engines that make wealthy white America run smoothly. In portraying her caregivers, she makes visible the “invisible.” As Gomez shared, “It was inspired by saying, ‘I’m here. We exist.’”

Finance, Technology, and Law

The exhibition’s final section features work by **Sara Bennett** (public defender, The Legal Aid Society), **Ragen Moss** (transactional lawyer), **Jim Campbell** (hardware design engineer), **Jeff Koons** (commodities broker), **VLM (Virginia L. Montgomery)** (graphic facilitator), and **Tishan Hsu** (word processor at a law firm).

During her nearly two decades as a public defender, Bennett began photographing women with life sentences both inside and outside of prison. In works such as *JUDY, 69, in the nursery at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility* (2019) and *TAYLOR, 36, in the fire and safety office at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility* (2018), asks us to consider women in prison beyond their crimes. Bennett took up photography because she felt that pictures and testimony from incarcerated women could change public attitudes around criminal justice.



Tishan Hsu, *Portrait*, 1982

While Bennett contemplates the harsh realities of the present day, Hsu's work has its basis in a contemplation of the future. As a word processor in the 1970s and '80s, he considered society's relationship with screens, and their daily effect on lives and bodies. For nearly ten years, Hsu worked as a word processor at night while making paintings during the day. The resulting works feature rounded corners that presciently echo the shape and cadence of the technologies that would soon be omnipresent.

Day Jobs presents an alternate art history, one that upends familiar narratives and myths around artists. Its ideas challenge typical notions about what success looks like, how ideas are formed, and who should be allowed to make art. The exhibition opens February 19, 2023 and will remain on view through July 23, 2023.

A presentation of the exhibition will open at the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University in 2024.

Press Preview

Press is invited to preview *Day Jobs* on **Friday, February 17, 2023 at 2 p.m.**, with exhibition curator Veronica Roberts.

Digital Resources

Audio interviews with many of the artists included in the exhibition will be available at blantonmuseum.org/dayjobs.

Day Jobs is organized by the Blanton Museum of Art.

Presenting Partner: Indeed

Generous funding for this exhibition is provided in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, John H. Baker and Christine Ogata, Ellen and David Berman, and Anthony and Celeste Meier; with additional

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About the Blanton Museum of Art

Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art holds the largest public collection in Central Texas with more than 21,000 objects. Recognized as the home of Ellsworth Kelly's *Austin*, its major collecting areas are modern and contemporary U.S. and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance and Baroque paintings, and prints and drawings. The Blanton offers thought-provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art.

Image Captions:

Violette Bule, *Dream America*, 2015, chromogenic prints, each: 30 x 36 in., Collection of the artist (photo: © Violette Bule)

Fred Wilson, *Grey Area (Brown version)*, 1993, pigment, plaster, and wood, overall: 20 x 84 in., Brooklyn Museum, Bequest of William K. Jacobs, Jr. and bequest of Richard J. Kempe, by exchange 2008.6a-j (photo: © Fred Wilson, courtesy Pace Gallery)

Frank Stella, *Miniature Benjamin Moore Series*, 1962, alkyd on raw canvas (Benjamin Moore flat wall paint), additional dimension: 12 1/16 x 12 1/16 in., Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Andy Warhol (photo: © 2022 Frank Stella / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York)

Chuck Ramirez, *Whatacup*, 2002/2014, permanent ink print on resin-coated paper, 72 x 48 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Commissioned by Artpace San Antonio, museum purchase, 2019 (photo: Courtesy of Ruiz-Healy Art San Antonio & New York City)

Genesis Belanger, *Stepford Wife / Sister Wife*, 2018, stoneware, porcelain, plaster, and linen lampshade, overall: 27 x 14 x 10 in., Collection of Rachel Uffner, New York (photo: © Genesis Belanger, Courtesy of Mrs., Maspeth, NY)

Jay Lynn Gomez, *Self-Portrait*, 2013, acrylic on magazine, 11 x 8 1/2 in., Durón Family Collection (photo: © Jay Lynn Gomez, courtesy of the Durón Family Collection)

Tishan Hsu, *Portrait*, 1982, oil stick, enamel, acrylic, and vinyl cement compound on wood, 57 x 87 x 6 in., Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (photo: © 2022 Tishan Hsu / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York)