

***Boston's Apollo* Exhibition Text**

SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY

Boston's Apollo: Thomas McKeller and John Singer Sargent

[INTRO TEXT]

Thomas Eugene McKeller (1890–1962)—a Black elevator operator and artist's model—bore witness to some of America's most traumatic social upheavals. He experienced the introduction of Jim Crow segregation laws but never lived to see their abolition. As a teenager, he joined the Great Migration, arriving in Boston and finding employment at the Hotel Vendome where a chance encounter introduced him to American painter John Singer Sargent (1856–1925). McKeller became Sargent's principal model in this country. Murals, drawings, and a full-length nude painting memorialize nearly a decade of work in the artist's studio, where Sargent transformed McKeller into Apollo—god of the arts—as well as goddesses, allegories, soldiers, and more. The painter subsequently gifted a portfolio of these drawings to his patron Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840–1924).

This exhibition shares Sargent's drawings and McKeller's story for the first time, exploring the intersections of this model's life with those of Sargent and Gardner. In the process, it raises many questions. How does history erase one man who played such a pivotal role in Boston's public art? What were the dynamics of this artist-model relationship and how was it shaped by racial politics and vast disparity of class? Was this a purely professional association or a personal one too? Many voices—including the museum's community collaborators, McKeller's acquaintances, and a member of his family—contributed their thoughts, and we invite you to share your own responses.

These questions of race, class, and sexuality are as relevant to our present as they are to the past. Installations by contemporary artists Lorraine O'Grady and Adam Pendleton extend the conversation across the museum. O'Grady's *Strange Taxi, Stretched*, on the outdoor facade, reflects on her family's experiences of displacement prompted by their move from Jamaica to Boston's Roxbury neighborhood. Pendleton's *Elements of Me*, on the ground floor of the museum's Palace building, explores concepts of blackness through vocabularies of abstraction. We hope they prompt new conversations, encouraging us to consider what has changed and what has not.

The lead sponsors of *Boston's Apollo: Thomas McKeller and John Singer Sargent* and exhibition-related programming are Amy and David Abrams, Bank of America, and the Henry Luce Foundation. Additional support is provided by the Arthur F. and Alice E. Adams Charitable Foundation, Chauncey & Marion D. McCormick Family Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Wyeth Foundation for

American Art. The Museum receives operating support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.



John Singer Sargent, *Atlas and the Hesperides* (detail), 1922-25. Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912 and Picture Fund. (c) 2020 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



The community collaborators, whose perspectives are featured in the exhibition text and timeline, are: Kadahj Bennett, Daniel Corral, Ryan Dias-Toppin, Stephen Hamilton, Allentza Michel, Fiona Phie, Destiny Polk, Valerie Stephens, Chanel Thervil, and Theo Tyson.

ANTEROOM GALLERY

[THEME PANEL]

Thomas Eugene McKeller

(1890–1962)

Born in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1890, Thomas Eugene McKeller moved to Boston in his mid-teens. One of many Black Americans to head North during the Great Migration, he was likely driven by considerations including Wilmington's devastating racial violence of 1898 and the state's introduction of Jim Crow laws one year later. Segregation in Boston was at the time enforced socially and economically rather than legally. McKeller joined a growing community of newly arrived Black Southerners, attracted by job opportunities in hotels, on Pullman trains, and in other service industries.

Settling into one of the South End's many boarding houses, McKeller found work nearby. By 1913, he operated the elevator at the Vendome, Boston's premier luxury hotel and visiting artist John Singer Sargent's local residence. A chance encounter there changed their lives forever. Sargent, recently asked to create a cycle of murals for the city's Museum of Fine Arts, invited McKeller to model for the project. Their work continued for eight years, encompassing not only the museum murals but also another at Harvard's Widener Library and a portrait of the university's president.

World War I delayed the MFA murals but opened new horizons for McKeller. Drafted in September 1918, he trained with a Black army brigade, the 811th Pioneer Infantry, but was spared combat by the armistice and discharged in December. Demobilization brought jobs to many veterans who found work in government offices, and McKeller moved to New York to take up a job at the Post Office. Returning to Boston that summer, he concluded his modeling for Sargent as well as the sculptor Cyrus Dallin. Government service offered more stability. Landing a coveted position at the Post Office, he purchased a home in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood and lived there until his death in 1962.

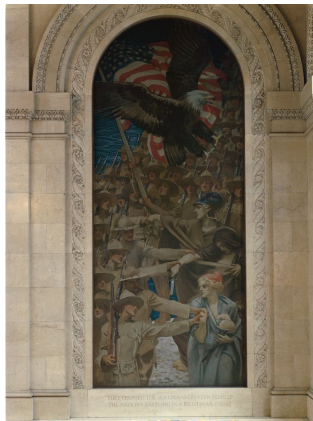
[wall label]

This Is Thomas McKeller

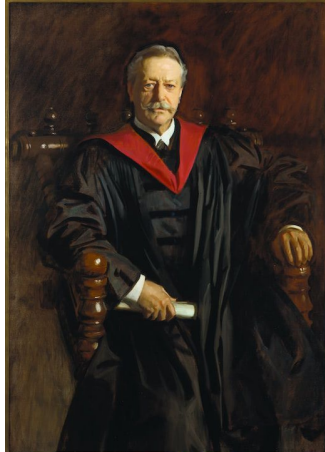
According to Thomas McKeller's own testimony, he modeled for at least four works of art in the Boston area. John Singer Sargent painted three of these: mural cycles for the Museum of Fine Arts and Harvard's Widener Library, as well as a portrait of the university's president Abbott Lawrence Lowell (McKeller modeled his pose). The sculptor Cyrus Dallin met McKeller in Sargent's studio and worked with the model to create the fourth, a statue of Massasoit to commemorate the tercentenary of the peace treaty between the Wampanoag tribe and the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock.



John Singer Sargent's Murals in the Dome of the Ruth and Carl J. Shapiro Rotunda, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photo: (c) 2020 Museum of Fine Arts Boston



John Singer Sargent, *Entering the War*, 1922. Oil on canvas. Harvard University Portrait Collection, Anonymous gift to the University. Photo: President and Fellows of Harvard College



John Singer Sargent, *Abbott Lawrence Lowell*, 1923-24. Oil on canvas. Harvard University Portrait Collection, Gift to Harvard College of members of the Board of Overseers who served during President Lowell's administration, 1924. Photo: President and Fellows of Harvard College

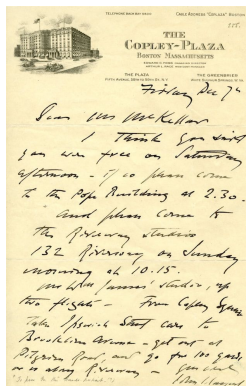


Cyrus E. Dallin, *Massasoit, Great Sachem of the Wampanoags*, 1921. Photo: Courtesy of Historic New England

[CASE RAIL LABELS]

Archival Materials

Scarce surviving letters and ephemera attest to the interactions between Thomas McKeller, John Singer Sargent, and Isabella Stewart Gardner during the work on the Museum of Fine Arts murals.



John Singer Sargent

Letter to Thomas McKeller from Boston

7 December 1919

Boston Athenaeum

Sargent must have written to Thomas McKeller countless times to arrange sittings, but only this 1919 letter survives. He invites McKeller to his main studio in the Back Bay neighborhood, and then to another in the Fenway district. Sargent borrowed it from the novelist Henry James's nephew Billy, a painter and teacher at the Massachusetts Normal Art School (now Massachusetts College of Art and Design).



John Singer Sargent

Cast of an Urn for the Rotunda of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1916–21

Plaster

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

Sargent probably gave Gardner this small-scale model for an urn, part of his scale model of the Museum of Fine Arts rotunda. He planned two monumental pairs of urns for balconies over the rotunda's side entrances.



John Singer Sargent, designer

P.P. Caproni and Brother, manufacturer

Rosette for the Rotunda Ceiling Moldings, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Before 1 April 1919

Cast plaster in a wood support

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

Sargent designed not only paintings and sculpted reliefs for his murals but also architectural moldings. Gardner either took this one or received it as a gift, part of a group that she used to construct a fireplace hood for her country estate in Brookline, Massachusetts.



John Singer Sargent

Letter and Envelope with Check for \$20 to Thomas A. Fox from London

22 August 1923

Boston Athenaeum

While traveling, Sargent kept in touch with his agent Thomas A. Fox, who managed the artist's affairs in Boston. In this letter, he instructs Fox to find McKeller, insisting "[I] don't know what I shall do without him" and offering \$20. McKeller, then in New York City, returned to Boston without immediate financial incentive—he never cashed the check—and continued working with Sargent.

See letter to Fox from J.S.S. 22 Aug. 1923
187 (Museum) P. 2

May 22/27

Mr. Fox —

Dear Sir, I am well trusting
these few lines will find you
same. Mr. Fox If it is not
asking to much I would like
to know if you had any luck
in getting off the letter as I am
in need of some ready money to
pay on a loan that I was force
to get over a year ago + I also need
some clothing as you see I am in
quite a little rut. I will be glad
to get every little. every little bit
helps trusting you can help me

Thomas McKeller

Letter to Thomas A. Fox from Boston

22 May 1927

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The John Singer Sargent Archive—Gift of Richard and Leonee Ormond

4/15/27
Boston, Mass.

Mr. Fox Dear Sir,

I received the letter bearing the
check for ten dollars. These are just a
few lines of thanks for same, it
help me much. I trust you will have
some good luck with the letter in the
near future. I am well trusting these few
lines will find you enjoying good health.

Sincerely,
Thomas E. McKeller.
775 Columbia Ave.,
South Scituate.

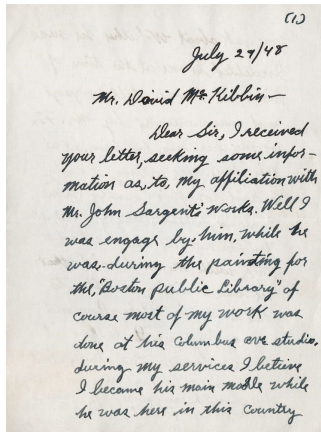
Thomas McKeller

Letter to Thomas A. Fox from Boston

15 June 1927

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The John Singer Sargent Archive—Gift of Richard and Leonee Ormond

After Sargent's death, McKeller wrote to the artist's executor seeking money to pay off a loan and received \$10 in response. Sargent, by contrast, received \$40,000 as partial payment for the museum murals. These sums attest to the vast socioeconomic disparity between both men, who relied on one another for at least eight years.



Handwritten letter on aged paper. At the top right, the number "113" is written. The date "July 29/48" is written in the upper center. The recipient's name "Mr. David McKibbin—" is written on the left. The body of the letter is written in cursive and reads: "Dear Sir, I received your letter, seeking some information as to my affiliation with Mr. John Sargent's works. Well I was engaged by him, while he was, during the painting for the 'Boston Public Library' of course most of my work was done at his Chelsea Ave studio, during my services I believe I became his main model while he was here in this country."

Thomas McKeller

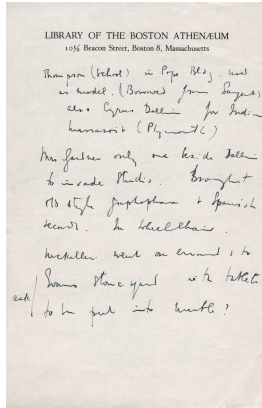
Letter to David McKibbin from Boston

29 July 1948

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The John Singer Sargent Archive—Gift of Richard and Leonee Ormond

Thomas McKeller wrote to Sargent's biographer David McKibbin, who sought to interview the painter's models. As McKeller observed, "I became his main model while he was here in this country."

Sargent's biographer interviewed Thomas McKeller and kept these notes. In them, McKeller details his work as a model, which resulted in the four works of art reproduced above these cases.



David McKibbin

Letter to Richard Ormond

16 January 1970

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The John Singer Sargent Archive—Gift of Richard and Leonee Ormond

A pioneering scholar, Richard Ormond corresponded regularly with biographer David McKibbin. Here the latter recalls a conversation with McKeller, who described carrying Isabella Stewart Gardner up the stairs to Sargent's studio.

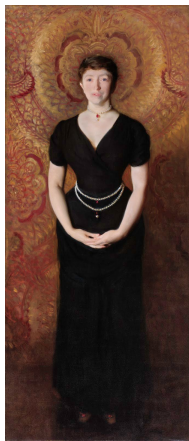
[TIMELINE]

Thomas McKeller's Boston

—Contributions by Allentza Michel and Valerie Stephens

1884 — Isabella Stewart Gardner meets John Singer Sargent.

1888 — John Singer Sargent paints Isabella's portrait.



John Singer Sargent, *Isabella Stewart Gardner*, 1888. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

1890 — Thomas McKeller is born in Wilmington, North Carolina.

1898 — Alarmed by Black political and business success, vigilantes intimidate Black voters and rampage through the city, killing Black citizens and destroying their businesses.



A mob stands in front of the destroyed printing press of the *Daily Record*, an African American-owned and -edited newspaper in Wilmington, North Carolina, 10 November 1898. Cabinet card by H. Cronenberg. Courtesy of New Hanover County Public Library, North Carolina Room

1899 — North Carolina introduces the state's first Jim Crow laws, legalizing and enforcing racial segregation.

1900 — Educator and reformer Booker T. Washington founds the National Negro Business League in Boston to promote the interests of Black-owned businesses, with the goal of establishing an economic network as a path to social equality. It continues to operate today as the National Negro Business League.



Executive Committee of the National Negro Business League, about 1910. Booker T. Washington is seated, second from the left. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-B2- 2053-15

1901 — Businessman and civil rights activist William Monroe Trotter founds the *Boston Guardian*, the first Black independent weekly newspaper. The *Guardian* was most famous for its editorials, in which Trotter denounced segregation and attacked Booker T. Washington for his conservative ideology.

1903 — Isabella opens her museum to the public.

1906 — Julia O. Henson, Cornelia Robinson, Annie W. Young, Fannie R. Contine, Jestina A. Johnson, Sylvia Fern, and Hibernia Waddell formally incorporate the Harriet Tubman House at 25 Holyoke Street in Boston's South End as a place of lodging for Black women who migrate to Boston from the South. The organization continues today on Columbus Avenue as part of the United South End Settlements.

1913 — Thomas McKeller arrives in Boston.

1915 — Black musicians form the American Federation of Musicians Union Local 535 in the South End, registering well-known local and national jazz artists. Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Chick Webb, Earl Hines, and Jimmie Lunceford were all members and frequently played at nightclubs and hotels in Boston.

1916 — Thomas McKeller and John Singer Sargent meet at the Hotel Vendome and begin working together.



The Hotel Vendome

1918 — Thomas McKeller is drafted into military service during World War I and serves in a Black infantry battalion from September until December 7. The war ends before he can be sent overseas.

1921 — John Singer Sargent completes the first phase of the rotunda murals at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

1921 — John Singer Sargent gives Isabella Stewart Gardner the drawings of Thomas McKeller.

1924 — Thomas McKeller begins working at the United States Post Office on Burlington Avenue. Isabella Stewart Gardner dies.

1925 — John Singer Sargent completes the second phase of the rotunda murals at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He dies in the same year.

1925 — A. Philip Randolph forms and leads the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first predominantly Black labor union. Many Boston men worked for the Pullman Car Company, the single largest employer of Black men in the country in the 1920s and '30s. In 1986, a nine-foot-tall statue of Randolph was installed in the Back Bay MBTA station to recognize his impact on the fight for civil rights.



Statue of A. Philip Randolph, founder of the union of Sleeping Car Porters

1933 — Community activist and “First Lady of Roxbury” Melnea Cass participates in protests against Boston department stores that refused to hire Black women as salesgirls. In 1981, Melnea Cass Boulevard in nearby Lower Roxbury is named in her honor.

1934 — Thomas McKeller marries Noreina (Rena or Reena) Elizabeth Meads.

1936 — Artist Allan Crite graduates from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Crite spends most of his career as an illustrator in the planning department of the Boston Naval Shipyards but is best-known for his paintings depicting the daily life of Boston’s Black community. Crite met Isabella Stewart Gardner when he was ten years old and continued to visit the museum for the rest of his life.



Allan Rohan Crite, *On Old Northampton Street, Boston*, 1939. Boston Athenaeum

1941 — Malcolm Little moves to Roxbury to live with his sister Ella at her home on Dale Street. He spends his teenage years in Boston before leaving in the early 1950s. As Malcolm X, he went on to become one of the most militant, influential, and controversial activists of the civil rights movement.



Malcolm X in front of the Malcolm X Ella Little Collins House in Roxbury, 1941

1941 — Thomas McKeller takes the federal employee oath of loyalty as per the terms of the Hatch Act, which prohibited membership in any group advocating the overthrow of the government (and targeted members of the Communist Party).

1942 — Thomas McKeller registers for the World War II draft.

1947 — Joseph L. Walcott is the first to own a Black American nightclub in Boston with the opening of Wally's Paradise at 428 Massachusetts Avenue. It is one of the oldest continually operating jazz clubs in the country and presents live music at its current location at 427 Massachusetts Avenue.

1949 — Social workers Muriel and Otto Snowden, along with community activist Melnea Cass, open Freedom House, a community nonprofit, at 151 Humboldt Street in Roxbury with the goal of promoting racial equality, particularly through access to education for low-income students of color.

1950 — Educator Elma Lewis opens the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts in Roxbury to provide visual and performing arts education for the Black community in Boston. She later founded the National Center of Afro-American Artists, an organization that included the school and local arts groups as well as a museum.

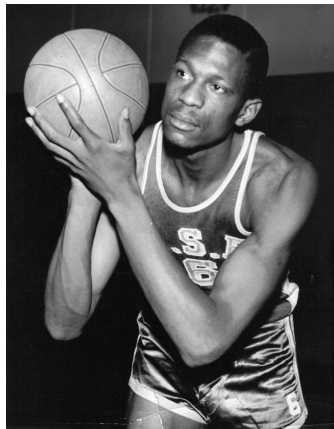


The Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, Roxbury

1951 — Martin Luther King Jr. enrolls at Boston University, earning his doctorate in systematic theology in 1955. During his time in Boston, Dr. King lived in the South End and met his future wife, Coretta King, who was studying opera at the New England Conservatory of Music.

1954 — The Supreme Court rules that the racial segregation of children in schools is unconstitutional in the landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education*.

1956 — Basketball superstar Bill Russell begins playing center for the Boston Celtics, launching a thirteen-year career in which he helped the team win eleven NBA championships. In the same year, he also captains the gold-medal winning U.S. National basketball team at the Summer Olympics. As a player-coach for the Celtics from 1966 to 1969, he became the first Black coach in North American professional sports.



Bill Russell practicing a free-throw, about 1953–56

1962 — Thomas McKeller dies.

1964 — The passage of the Civil Rights Act outlaws segregation in public spaces as well as employment discrimination based on race, religion, sex, or national origin.

Despite the Civil Rights Act, Boston continued to struggle with racial inequities and still does today. We all can learn from our past to build a more inclusive Boston for the next generation.

[FILM LABEL]

Finding Thomas McKeller

Helga Davis

2019

About 10 minutes

Research conducted by the Gardner Museum over the last three years revealed the story of Thomas McKeller's work with John Singer Sargent to his family. Gardner Museum's Visiting Curator of Performing Arts, Helga Davis, interviewed descendants of family and friends who knew McKeller. In this film, McKeller's great-niece Deidre O'Bryant shares her thoughts and several project collaborators describe their roles in this journey.

[AUDIO CLIP LABEL]

Excerpt of an Interview with Anton Kamp

11 March 1983

Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

About 1 minute and 30 seconds

Like Thomas McKeller, art student Anton Kamp also modeled for John Singer Sargent. In 1921, he posed for one of the four ceiling roundels in the Museum of Fine Arts murals. Listen to his memories of McKeller using the headphones.

[AUDIO CLIP - TRANSCRIPT]

Barbara Buff: The first question I have for you is a very basic one. I want to know what year it was that you worked as Sargent's model.

Anton Kamp: 1921 and it began in June of 1921 and lasted until, oh, early September—the latter part of August, early September.

Barbara: Did you ever know any of his other models?

Anton: Yes. . . . His name was McKeller. . . . The real muscular man that was like Mr. Universe was McKeller, and I asked him, I said, "How did you develop this body?" and he said, "Well, I'm a contortionist."

Barbara: Really!

Anton: Yeah, but he didn't . . . Sargent made a full figure, a sporting figure of McKeller, and it hung way up on the wall in this twelve-foot-high, fourteen-foot-high room in this building where he was working, on the wall up there, and I saw it several times. But he was rather, I don't know, I would say, indifferent. "Put it over there, get it out of the way, hang it up there, I don't care what you do with it." You know, that sort of a thing.

Barbara: Pretty casual about it, it seems?

Anton: Yeah, very casual about it. Yeah.

Barbara: Were you or the other models invited to any of the opening ceremonies they had when they finally unveiled . . . ?

Anton: Oh, yes, I was there, I don't think that Andrew [another model] was there. I wouldn't have known Andrew, I hadn't met him. McKeller wasn't there, but there was a good contingent from the Massachusetts Normal Art School, and of course everyone wanted to see Sargent.

HOSTETTER MAIN GALLERY

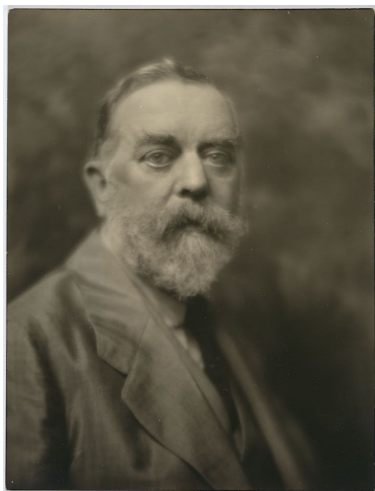
[CHAT LABEL]

John Singer Sargent and Isabella Stewart Gardner

In 1916, John Singer Sargent arrived in Boston for his first visit in thirteen years. A local celebrity and one of America's most renowned painters, he was increasingly preoccupied with his artistic legacy and set aside portraiture for murals: monumental public works that could secure his posthumous fame. Trustees of the city's Museum of Fine Arts invited him to decorate the interior of the entrance to their new building in Boston's Fenway. Sargent's ambitious proposal reimagined the rotunda as a shrine to the arts of antiquity. The museum accepted, paying him \$40,000 for the project.

Sargent's compositions rely on human figures. He employed local models, principally Thomas McKeller, who posed for both the men and women. In Sargent's Pope Building studio, McKeller adopted often difficult postures, and Sargent worked through ideas in countless charcoal sketches. Over two hundred survive for the museum murals alone. Sargent chose a group of nine and one reproductive print, signed each, and probably presented the group to Isabella Stewart Gardner in 1921.

Gardner and Sargent contributed to one another's successes. Close friends and confidantes, the widow and bachelor rejoiced in each other's company. Gardner acquired over sixty of his works for her museum and closely followed Sargent's progress on the murals. When a stroke in 1919 left her incapacitated, Sargent arranged a preview for his friend, bringing her wheelchair up in a freight elevator, and having Gardner carried onto the scaffolding in a bath chair. She also frequently visited the artist's studio and likely met Thomas McKeller on many occasions, one of which is documented.



[CHAT LABEL]

The Museum of Fine Arts Murals

John Singer Sargent's murals celebrate the Museum of Fine Arts as a temple of culture, heir to the artistic legacies of ancient Greece and Rome. Gods and goddesses join allegories and personifications of painting, sculpture, and architecture. Unveiled in 1921, Sargent's rotunda met with staggering success. The trustees invited him to extend the program over the building's grand staircase and inspired the president of Harvard University to commission a pair of monumental murals for Widener Library. Sargent completed both but did not live to see the museum paintings installed, passing away in April 1925.



John Singer Sargent's Murals in the Dome of the Ruth and Carl J. Shapiro Rotunda, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Paintings

1. Architecture, Painting, and Sculpture Protected by Athena from the Ravages of Time
2. Astronomy
3. Classic and Romantic Art
4. Prometheus
5. The Sphinx and the Chimæra
6. Ganymede and the Eagle
7. Apollo and the Muses
8. Music

Bas-Reliefs

- A. Satyr and Nymph
- B. Three Dancing Figures
- C. Arion
- D. Three Graces
- E. Chiron and Achilles
- F. Aphrodite and Eros
- G. Faun
- H. Eros and Psyche

John Singer Sargent's Murals in the Dome of the Ruth and Carl J. Shapiro Rotunda, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photo: (c) 2020 Museum of Fine Arts Boston

[object label]



John Singer Sargent

A.W. Elson & Co. (active Boston, 1894–1925) or Heliotype Printing Company

(active Boston, late 19th and early 20th century)—printer

Study of a Seated Male Nude in a Roundel for the Rotunda of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1921

Collotype print on blue-gray paper

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

Following the murals' completion, the Museum of Fine Arts reproduced several of Sargent's drawings and sold them in the museum shop. Thomas McKeller posed for this one, not preparatory for any single figure in the final paintings but perhaps a souvenir or commemoration of the project.

[object label]



John Singer Sargent

Study of Two Male Nudes for a Cartouche for the Rotunda of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1916–21

Charcoal on paper

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

Poised on a cushion with arms raised, Thomas McKeller poses for pairs of nude figures modeled in plaster relief above the rotunda's four roundels. These sculpted images have no individual identities but collectively celebrate the figurative arts and the bodies they depend on.



John Singer Sargent, *The Cartouche over Music*, 1921. Painted and gilded plaster. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bartlett Collection—Museum purchase with funds from the Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912 and Picture Fund.

[COMMUNITY RESPONSE]

To hold the weight
Delicate dance
Of a most extreme legacy
Unnamed, passed up and on through
Invisible tongues.

The Danger of posture
Balancing a crystalized heaven
Where the angels are charcoal black
Hardly captured
In a twist upholding
A truest calling.

Attention to pride
Suspended in a spell
Intention in vision cast forward
In tension, jaws locked and
muscles drawn back.

To hold the weight
Of delicate danger
Before illusion,
was
Black.
—Destiny Polk

[object label]



John Singer Sargent

Study of a Seated Male Nude for the Rotunda or Grand Staircase of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1916–21

Charcoal on paper

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

Seated on a stool with one arm outstretched, McKeller tilts his body off-center and gazes downward. The relationship of this drawing to the murals remains unclear, but it may be an early study for *Perseus* or a rider such as *Arion* or *Achilles*.



John Singer Sargent, *Perseus on Pegasus Slaying Medusa*, 1922-25. Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bartlett Collection—Museum purchase with funds from the Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912 and Picture Fund. Photo: (c) 2020 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

[COMMUNITY RESPONSE]

The most striking part of this drawing is the pervasive sense of listlessness. There is little tension, other than in the legs, and the rest of his body seems as if it could collapse in on itself. He is turning away from the light source, seemingly not out of protection but into vulnerability, potentially exhaustion. Even as a study, Sargent captures a moment: maybe a stretch or roll of the neck during a break, or even a warm-up. Yet, it is a moment realized with the utmost attention.

—Ryan Dias-Toppin

[object label]



John Singer Sargent

Study of a Seated Male Nude for the Rotunda or Grand Staircase of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1916–21

Charcoal on paper

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

Sargent captures McKeller in sharp profile, likely during a session devoted to modeling the rotunda's pairs of nude figures sculpted in plaster. In addition to his face, a birthmark or flap of skin protruding from his chest and visible in other drawings identifies the sitter as McKeller.

[PERSONAL RESPONSE]

To be drawn, defined. To be erased, redefined. It is no surprise that your Black body is the muse for Sargent's masterpieces. His depictions of gods and goddesses could only be of a Black, queer body for who else held such poetry within them? Who else could birth masterpiece upon masterpiece while unknown? Whiteness is imperfect, a tool created for oppression; there is no way to draw beauty from such a tool. You, Thomas, are the answer. Only from your Black body could a vision of paradise be imagined.

—Fiona Phie and Sienna Kwami

[object label]



John Singer Sargent

Study of a Seated Male Nude above a Roundel for the Rotunda of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1916–21

Charcoal on paper

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

With quick and confident charcoal marks, Sargent captures McKeller's face in profile and traces the contours of his muscular arms. Like the others in this series, McKeller's pose does not correspond to a single painted or sculpted figure in the rotunda. Below, Sargent sketches the contours of the rotunda and one of its cartouche frames in profile.

[PERSONAL RESPONSE]

Remnants

A Poem for Thomas McKeller

Where did I start?

Maybe with the creator's breath in my lungs

Full, deep, and quietly expanding
Maybe with the artist's charcoal caressing the curves of my neck
Dashes, lines, and accents amplifying perfection untapped
Maybe with outstretched arms reaching towards the stars of my future
But like a smothered flame, rising only as smoke
I can't quite grasp
Where did I end?
With my blackness fleeting
Feet fading into the distance
Leaving me stuck
Merely a backdrop for layers
Deemed more pleasing
Less complicated, if unstained

—Chanel Thervil

[object label]



John Singer Sargent

Study for Eros and Psyche for the Rotunda of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1916–21

Charcoal on paper

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

Thomas McKeller modeled this figure for a rotunda relief, featuring *Eros* who plunged out of the heavens and into Psyche's arms, literally falling in love. Sargent focuses here on McKeller's muscular legs and shapely torso, reserving the poses of his arms and head for other studies.



John Singer Sargent, *Eros and Psyche*, 1919-20. Painted plaster. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bartlett Collection—Museum purchase with funds from the Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912. Photo: (c) 2020 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

[COMMUNITY RESPONSE]

Sargent renders McKeller as a heavenly body in turmoil, literally pushing him to the edge in transforming a Black man into Eros, the Greek god of love and desire. Not only is McKeller beheaded—his torso is left unshaded, perhaps an attempt by Sargent to erase his blackness and add an element of whiteness that could have made his desire for McKeller more personally and socially acceptable. This transmutation provokes questions and conjures answers surrounding the racial and sexual tensions of the indelible taboo of same sex, interracial intimacy.

Sargent's parceling, erasure, and othering of McKeller's body reflects the intersection of an inherent legacy of white male supremacy and heteronormative patriarchy; a legacy deeply rooted in sociocultural constructs and standards of race, class, gender, and sexuality that prefer and empower white, wealthy, dominant, "straight" men.

—Theo Tyson

[group object label]



John Singer Sargent

Study for Chiron and Achilles for the Rotunda of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1916–21

Charcoal on paper

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston



John Singer Sargent

Study for Chiron and Achilles for the Rotunda of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1916–21

Charcoal on paper

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

Balanced on the centaur Chiron, the young Achilles draws back his bow to fire an arrow. Half man, half horse, Chiron—the adopted son of Apollo—mentored Greek hero Achilles in the arts of war and peace. Here, Sargent focuses on the twisting backs of each torso, eventually abandoning this approach for a frontal arrangement.



John Singer Sargent, Achilles and Chiron, 1919-20. Painted plaster. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bartlett Collection—Museum purchase with funds from the Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912. Photo: (c) 2020 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

[COMMUNITY RESPONSE]

Young Achilles—street archer. Shoot your shot! Focus hot. Target in vision.
Princely precision. Could be royalty. Address me with the royal we.
The gravity is dire.
Extend—Reach higher, young bull.
Extraordinary power in your backbone.
Conjure a cyclone with your momentum and high energy.
Slinging slang like venom. Fighting for existence. Soldiers made mythical.
Young bucks now faceless. Torso twisted and contorted. Bodies exported.
Guardians of the ghetto now Greek n godlike.
Beast of a new name. Caesar cut. Scrapped, smudged.
Just as weak as Achilles if cut down just right. Hope you gallop again into sunlight.

—Kadahj Bennett

[object label]



John Singer Sargent

Study for Three Dancing Figures for the Rotunda of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1916–21

Charcoal on paper

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

Although McKeller modeled for many of the rotunda's female figures, Sargent also made studies from female models. In this case, the artist sketches the legs and feet of Gladys or Lilian White for his relief of *Three Dancing Figures*.



John Singer Sargent, *Three Dancing Figures*, 1919-20. Painted plaster. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bartlett Collection—Museum purchase with funds from the Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912. Photo: (c) 2020 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

[object label]



John Singer Sargent

Study for Three Dancing Figures for the Rotunda of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1916–21

Charcoal on paper

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

Model Anna Wendell posed for this rapid sketch, a study for the central twisting nude in Sargent's plaster relief of *Three Dancing Figures*. An inscription provides Wendell's name and address so she could be called back. For other female forms, Sargent relied on male models including McKeller, reimagining his body with prosthetic breasts shaped from cheesecloth.

[object label]



John Singer Sargent

Study for Classic and Romantic Art for the Rotunda of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1916–21

Charcoal on paper

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The Sargent Collection—Gift of Miss Emily Sargent and Mrs. Violet Ormond in memory of their brother, John Singer Sargent

Standing erect, Thomas McKeller raises his head in song. Sargent envisioned this allegory of *Classic and Romantic Art* as a singing contest, here making detailed studies of McKeller's face. He eventually replaced the model's head with one from a classical statue but retained the open-mouthed expression.



John Singer Sargent, *Classic and Romantic Art* (detail), 1921. Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bartlett Collection—Museum purchase with funds from the Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912. Photo: (c) 2020 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

[object label]



John Singer Sargent

Study for Apollo in Classic and Romantic Art for the Rotunda of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1916–21

Charcoal on paper

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The Sargent Collection—Gift of Miss Emily Sargent and Mrs. Violet Ormond in memory of their brother, John Singer Sargent

Sargent's transformation of McKeller into Apollo emerges clearly on this sheet. Beginning at the top right, he sketches the model's head and neck. Below, the artist copies the god's head from a plaster cast of the *Apollo Belvedere*, a celebrated Roman sculpture. At the far left, he replaces McKeller's head with the sculpture's and places it on the model's shoulders.



John Singer Sargent, *Apollo and the Muses* (detail), 1921. Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bartlett Collection—Museum purchase with funds from the Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912. Photo: (c) 2020 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Roman copy of the Apollo Belvedere, BC 130-140. Museo Pio Clementino, Cortile Ottagono © Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons

[COMMUNITY RESPONSE THEME PANEL]

Class Dynamics and Power

Thomas McKeller transitioned from his position as a hotel bellhop to the primary model for John Singer Sargent after meeting on an elevator. This is symbolic of the intersection between race, class, and power that each man carried with them as they ascended to new heights of their careers.

Despite the erasure of his skin tone in Sargent's paintings, McKeller was paid for his labor. From 1921, one check survives for \$20, not paid out all at once but little by little over time. The modern-day equivalent for this sum is nearly three hundred dollars. In comparison, for his Museum of Fine Arts murals Sargent's *initial* payment was \$40,000. That modern-day equivalent is almost \$1,000,000.

What could it have been like for McKeller to navigate the spaces of the white and wealthy while Black?

—Chanel Thervil

[COMMUNITY RESPONSE THEME PANEL]

Erasure

One of the many dehumanizing practices of chattel slavery was the parceling and selling of Black bodies on the auction block. Humans of a darker hue were reduced to the perceived value of their coveted parts. The value of Black lives is erased in favor of commodification and objectification.

Sargent's affinity for McKeller's unique features is evidenced by his meticulous attention to detailing them in his drawings. Yet Sargent intentionally erases particular characteristics and distinguished features of McKeller when he evolves his studies into murals. He mutilates the identity of a young, beautiful Black man and morphs his body into white gods and goddesses for public consumption. As the artist, Sargent wields full control over his muse—a master to McKeller in a relationship reminiscent of slavery.

—Theo Tyson

[COMMUNITY RESPONSE THEME PANEL]

Queerness

Queerness, commonly characterized as uniqueness, refers to an individual or groups of people whose sexuality and gender identity differ or challenge established heterosexual norms and binary gender constructs. At a first glance at Sargent's sketches, Thomas McKeller embodies the statuesque, ancient, Greek-like male figure that surrounds Sargent's murals. However, in these same murals, McKeller's poses also display a femininity and essence that manifests as self-confidence in the way that he contorts and frames his body to be studied for the depiction of female bodies. To me, this was McKeller embracing his life and identity and to allow himself to be admired. I cannot speak directly about McKeller's sexuality, but his story and likeness to the queer experience speaks volumes to many who identify as queer and to how some relate to leaving behind home and family to discover ourselves and our identity in a new city in hope of acceptance.

—Daniel Corral

[COMMUNITY RESPONSE THEME PANEL]

Historical Context

Sargent's studies of Thomas McKeller open up multiple windows into the lives of both artist and model. They might reveal friendship or sexual attraction, present memoirs recorded for later use, or exhibit graphic and painterly skills. But they are also a particular kind of sketch: they are *academies*, named after the historic art schools of the European cities where Sargent received his early training. Such drawings and oil sketches, made by hundreds of aspiring artists, are the lasting relics of a strict pedagogical system. They are precise and repetitive exercises that were used to instruct would-be artists to render the human form by drawing and painting from live models. When considered in that context, we can see Sargent deliberately returning to his roots in an effort to master the new challenge of painting murals. We introduce McKeller as a professional, a model, part of an international community of men and women whose trade it was to appear—or to disappear—in order for a painter to realize his or her artistic vision. The two men needed one another.

—Erica Hirshler

[COMMUNITY RESPONSE THEME PANEL]

Power and Agency

Museums sometimes feel like murky elitist institutions with questionable histories, flooded with suggestive retellings of complicated pasts. We are aiming to evade anything unsettlingly suspect in the *Boston's Apollo* exhibition, considering the complexities of power and agency at play in McKeller and Sargent's relationship. Bravely bare and vulnerable, McKeller's beautiful Black body is dismembered, manipulated, and renegotiated for white consumption. Any action, effect, or influence McKeller may have intended through modeling could have been subverted by the dominant power structure Sargent had at his disposal. McKeller, at the famed hands of Sargent, has been color corrected, unsexed, and dehumanized for museums, private collections, and powerful institutions here and abroad. We are choosing to shine light on Boston's unsung Apollo: Thomas McKeller.

—Kadahj Bennett

[COMMUNITY RESPONSE THEME PANEL]

Model/Muse

We have been taught to understand the gaze as oppressive, colonizing, reductive, objectifying. We understand the artist/model relationship now as one of domination and consumption. The gaze is often gendered male, and anything it captures is feminized and weakened. And in this situation, we have a nude, beautifully proportioned working-class Black man being painted by a wealthy white artist. It seems we have all the material we need here to declare this a racist representation of Black subjugation—an eroticized fantasy of white dominance.

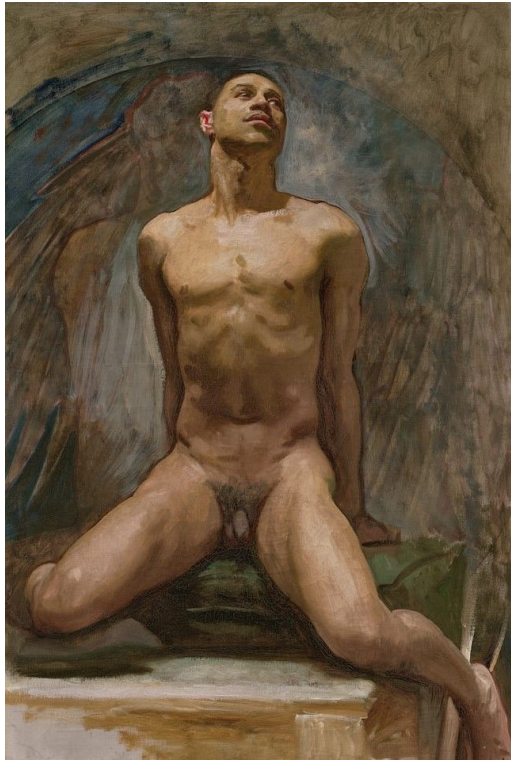
And yet.

I am trained as a portrait painter and I know that the model/artist relationship can be a collaborative one. There is a certain intimacy when someone models for you. It is not always some kind of clinical affair. The model is more than just something to copy or a still life object. The model has a profound effect on the choices that are possible in creating an artwork. I have had favorite models and I have had models with whom I never want to work again. Those favorites—the ones I returned to for years—are the ones who lent me not just their bodies for scrutiny, but their presence in my work. In fact, I would not have been able to *make* certain works if I did not have this particular model. So, the model is not just lending their body for visual information: the model is the presence that makes a work possible. The collaboration with the artist and the model is a way for the artist to access things that are unavailable to them.

Sargent was working on a commission for the MFA—an allegorical series of figures for the rotunda. How was he able to access the ideas of the Greek pantheon—to image Apollo and Achilles? Sargent's work dwells in *portraiture* and, given the intimacy this practice requires, he needed a collaborator with whom he had an intimate connection to allow him to dream of concepts larger and more allegorical. McKeller and Sargent collaborate here to explore ideas of beauty, power, submission, glory, and eroticism.

—Steve Locke

[object label]



John Singer Sargent

Thomas McKeller

1917–21

Oil on canvas

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Henry H. and Zoe Oliver Sherman Fund

Legs splayed, shoulders pulled back, and sitting erect, Thomas McKeller poses on a table. He turns and looks up, directing his gaze skyward, toward the light source. Sargent probably initiated this painting as a study for one of the roundels in the Museum of Fine Arts murals. Beginning to the left, Sargent blocks out the model's body on canvas and surrounds him with wings, perhaps the remnants of an abandoned idea to depict Prometheus with the eagle that attacked him in punishment for the titan's theft of fire from the gods.

Sargent eventually changed his mind, abandoning the allegorical composition and focusing on Thomas McKeller. No ordinary nude, this painting stands out in Sargent's oeuvre, elevating the academic practice of figure studies to the level of portraiture.

[COMMUNITY RESPONSE]

Sargent worked on this painting in private for three years (while developing the MFA murals) and it was never exhibited during his lifetime. It was not a commission (and he had painted plenty of those). It was a painting he made for himself. The subject, Thomas McKeller, is painted with an erotic languor and translucent steel blue wings. It calls to mind the idea of the fallen angel. Or even Prometheus bound to a rock. Or an adult Cupid, the winged god of erotic love.

As charged and erotic as I find this image, I recognize in it the work between an artist and their model, struggling together. This painting exists because McKeller's presence, not just his body, gave Sargent the courage to make it. Working with McKeller, through portraiture, Sargent was able to access a sensual and mythical presence so charged with frank humanity that it remains shocking to this day.

We do not know a lot about the relationship between McKeller and Sargent, but we do have the painting. And to my eye it is the kind of image that could only have been made in shared confidence and trust. I think of it as a kind of a miracle that these two men found each other and built the murals and this painting together—public and private.

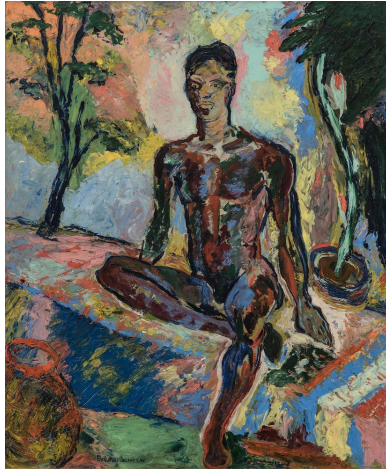
—Steve Locke

[COMMUNITY RESPONSE]

Within the murals at the Museum of Fine Arts, Thomas McKeller is under erasure, safely contained within the pale skins of Apollo and other mythological figures. Here, however, we see Mr. McKeller. He looks up to his left as if caught in a moment of ecstasy. Sargent captures the refinement of the limber contortionist's brown skin and musculature through contouring. Bathed in light, Sargent distinguishes McKeller's braced arms and splayed legs with care from the laboriously painted background. Through Sargent's exquisite drawings and paintings, we can celebrate McKeller's contributions to Boston history and to the history of American art writ large.

—Nikki A. Greene

[OBJECT LABEL]



Beauford Delaney

Dark Rapture (James Baldwin)

1941

Oil on masonite

Reproduction © Estate of Beauford Delaney; Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY

Beauford Delaney's first portrait of James Baldwin shares with Sargent's *Thomas McKeller* its bare nudity, frontal pose, and seated position. While both works differ significantly in style and technique, these similarities raise the question: Did Delaney know of Sargent's painting?

In 1923, Delaney arrived in Boston to study painting. He practiced by copying paintings in museum collections, including his favorite, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Delaney esteemed Sargent's paintings and paid at least one visit to his studio, where Delaney could have seen *Thomas McKeller* hanging on the wall high above.

[COMMUNITY RESPONSE]

This painting begs the question of what it means to be seen. It captures the moment that begins a lifelong friendship, encapsulating the moment that Beauford Delaney truly saw James Baldwin. It is a beautiful study, abstracting color and form yet eloquently translating the character of the subject. Baldwin is not infantilized, nor is he oversexualized. He is not an exotic

object, but a self-possessed young man. His pose is provocative but confident, mindful, almost meditative. Life is ahead of him, filled with endless possibilities. In a world unkind to many intersections of identity shared by both of these men, Delaney does not create an image of sorrow. He does not beg the viewer to empathize with Baldwin through pity. Instead, Baldwin is divinely cool. One cannot help but imagine that this Black queer artist looked at this younger Black queer artist and painted him as he needed to be seen. We view him not through the eyes of the proverbial other. We see him as both Delaney and Baldwin needed to see themselves.

—Stephen Hamilton

VISITOR RESPONSE AREA

Stories Worth Sharing

Boston's Apollo celebrates the accomplishments of Thomas McKeller. His story is one of many that deserve to be told. We invite you to share images of individuals whose achievements, like McKeller's, have been overlooked by posting a photo or drawing of them on Instagram. Tag us with #BostonsApollo.

Community Collaborator Biographies

An inclusive interpretation strategy and several community roundtable discussions for the *Boston's Apollo* exhibition have yielded multiple perspectives from local artists, scholars, community thought leaders, and Thomas McKeller's descendants, whose responses form a powerful presence through wall texts, audio, video, and a rich program of public talks and performances. We invite you to learn more about our collaborators' work in the following profiles.



Kadahj Bennett is an award-winning actor, educator and performer from the Boston area. Bennett has been a Teaching Artist in the community for the past 7 years. Affiliated with Company One Theater, SpeakEasy Stage, The Huntington Theater, Actors Shakespeare Project, Beyond Measure Productions, Zumix, and Harvard University. Bennett works on stage, screen, in galleries and classrooms alike. A graduate of the Boston Arts Academy and recipient of the Posse scholarship to Hamilton College, Bennett is on a mission to make you reevaluate your perspectives.



Daniel Corral is a Mexican-American artist whose work examines queer identity and spaces within their community and utilizes the camera obscura technique to create a portal between the

private lives and public agency of each individual. Their photographic work expands to include studies on immigration rights and migrant workers through street vendors and community organizers in Los Angeles, California. Corral has exhibited their work at the Distillery Gallery, School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Lesley University, the Villa Victoria Center for the Arts and at the Medal Gala Awards at the Museum of Fine Arts. They are a frequent collaborator with the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on public programs that focus on creating queer inclusion within the Museum.



Ryan Dias-Toppin is an event producer, vocalist, performance artist and multi-disciplinary visual artist whose work centers around creating access to spaces through events and fully engaging experiences. A convener and conduit, her work is defined by spatial, critical and cultural praxis; providing outlets, platforms and resources for ideas and those who wish to express them.



Stephen Hamilton is an artist and arts educator living and working in Boston, Massachusetts. Born and raised in Roxbury, Stephen graduated from Massachusetts College of Art and design in 2009 with a concentration in illustration. Stephen was the 2015-2016 Arts Connect

International (ACI) artist-in-residence. This allowed him to travel to Nigeria to study weaving, dyeing, and woodcarving at the Nike Center for art and culture. He has taught and mentored in the arts at College Bound Dorchester, Artists For Humanity, and he is currently an Assistant Professor at Massachusetts College of Art and Design.



Allentza Michel is a community planner, social practice artist and writer with experience in organizing and research. She has over 17 years of diverse experience across arts administration, placemaking, economic and workforce development, education, food security, public health and transportation. Ms. Michel is currently the Program Officer for Arts and Culture at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences where she works with a national commission on the arts conducting policy and advocacy research. She earned a Master's in Public Policy from Tufts University and has a Bachelors in English and Social and Political Systems. She was the inaugural fellow for the Association for Community Design in 2015 and a 2016 Creative Community Fellow with National Arts Strategies. Ms. Michel has founded and co-founded several non-profit organizations and community initiatives and has also served as a grant reviewer for the National Endowment for the Arts.



Fiona Phie is a Boston community organizer and is currently studying Political Science at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. They are currently the Executive Director of March for Our Lives Boston and the co-founder of The Red House. Fiona has been an organizer since they were 15 years old, and uses a racial equity lens to organize around gun violence prevention, civic engagement, education, climate justice, youth empowerment, queer & gender inequities and poverty issues.



Warrior and Healer. Tender and unbreakable. **Destiny "Divine" Polk**, whose name means "That which has been firmly established, God has answered, Dance", is an afro-indigenous, choreographer and producer, multi-disciplinary artist, community organizer/space holder, art-educator and founder of art-activist platform Radical Black Girl. Destiny's work is concerned about speaking truth to a country that attempts to rewrite its own history while having actively tried to suppress African and Native American history and culture. She is also deeply passionate about advocating for the radical awakening of the authentic self to become audacious, unapologetic and empowered. She intentionally creates spaces to support artists of color, low-income communities of color, womxn of color and young self-identifying Black girls.



Valerie Stephens is a performing artist/ arts educator with a passion for history. In addition to receiving a 2019 Bro. Thomas Fellowship with an unrestricted award of \$15,000, Valerie has received a 2019 Bridge Award in Arts, a 2018 Boston City Council Resolution for creating the annual event PRINCESS DAY: Celebrating Little Girls of Color and her commitment to Nina Simone's legacy, a 2017 New England Foundation for the Arts Creative City Grant for creating the Elder Storytelling Performance Project, the 2016 Get Konnected! Boston Legends & Pioneers Award, the 2011 NAACP Image Award, the 2007 Urban Music Award in Blues and was a nominee for the 2011 Urban Music Award in Jazz as well as Citations of Appreciation from the Cities of Boston, New Bedford and Springfield.



Chanel Thervil is a Haitian-American artist and educator obsessed with all things art, community, and history. She has a BFA in Painting from Pace University and MA in Art Education from MassArt. Recently, she's been making a splash in Boston via her public art, mixed media portraits, and joyful collaborations with institutions like the Urbano Project, Museum of Fine of Arts, DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, and the Boston Center for the Arts. Her art has been featured by The Boston Globe, The Bay State Banner, PBS Kids, WBUR's ARTery, and WGBH's Open Studio with Jared Bowen. To find out more about her work visit her website at www.chanelthervil.com



Theo Tyson interrogates the sociocultural aspects of race, gender, and sexuality through the lens of fashion, its histories and theories. Her research is firmly rooted in historical and contemporary photography and the performativity of fashioning an identity. She uses fashion,

art, and sociology to employ visual and material culture as an accessible, universal language to offer sartorial counternarratives that provide unique points of entry for civil discourse.

Tyson, who has held posts at Spelman College Museum of Fine Art and SCAD FASH Museum of Fashion + Film, is currently the Polly Thayer Starr Fellow in American Art and Culture at the Boston Athenæum where she engages and interprets their special collections through innovative and inclusive exhibitions and presentations.

Academic Collaborators

Nikki A. Greene, Ph.D. received her BA with honors in Art History from Wesleyan University, and her Masters and Ph.D. in Art History from the University of Delaware. Dr. Greene examines African American and African diaspora identities, the body, feminism, abstraction, and music in modern and contemporary art. She is the Visual Arts Editor of *Transition*, published by the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University (Indiana University Press).

Dr. Greene joined the faculty of Wellesley College as an Assistant Professor in the Art Department in 2013. She has traveled throughout the United States and internationally, including to Chile, England, Italy, and South Africa, to deliver lectures on the Arts of the African diaspora. In January 2013, she gave a series of lectures on African Art at the Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia. She is the recipient of the Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship in Art and Africana Studies at Wellesley College, the Woodrow Wilson Career Advancement Fellowship, and the Richard D. Cohen Fellowship at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard University. She was an artist-in-residence at the Ucross Foundation in Wyoming in spring 2019.

Her forthcoming book, *Grime, Glitter, and Glass: The Body and The Sonic in Contemporary Black Art* (Duke University Press, forthcoming 2021) presents a new interpretation of the work of Renée Stout, María Magdalena Campos-Pons, and Radcliffe Bailey, and considers the intersection between the body, black identity, and the sonic possibilities of the visual using key examples of painting, sculpture, photography, performance, and installation. She was shortlisted for the 2018 and 2019 Creative Capital Warhol Art Writers Grant.

Greene's essays have appeared in *American Studies Journal*, *Aperture*, *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art*, *The Delaware Review of Latin American Studies*, and WBUR Boston. Greene has also written for The Studio Museum in Harlem, The Guggenheim Museum, Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, among others.

Her most recent essay, "Thomas McKellar sous rature: John Singer Sargent's Erasure of a Black Model," appears in the exhibition catalogue *Boston's Apollo: Thomas McKellar and John Singer Sargent* (Yale University Press, 2020) for the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. She is also currently organizing two exhibitions: the first retrospective of the abstract painter Moe Brooker at the Woodmere Art Museum in Philadelphia (2022) and an exhibition on contemporary performance art by black female artists.

Nikki A. Greene proudly hails from Newark, NJ, and she lives with her husband and two children in Massachusetts. Greene's summer 2016 blog post "Eating Ice Cream While Black (Or My Life in Wellesley, Mass)" on microaggressions received local and national attention and was featured on WBUR Boston's Cognescenti and on Radio Boston to discuss "The Challenge of Raising Kids of Color in a Homogenous Community." She "muses" about her scholarly interests, travel, and the challenges of the work-life balance on her blog, nikkighd.com.

Dr. Erica Hirshler is Croll Senior Curator of American Paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. A prolific scholar of late nineteenth and early twentieth century American painting, particularly on Sargent's work in all media, she is especially interested in the vibrant artistic exchange between the United States and Europe and in issues of transnationalism, patronage, social performance, and the changing roles of women.

Steve Locke (b. 1963, Cleveland, OH) is a Boston-based artist, raised in Detroit, Michigan. He received an M.F.A. in 2001 from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design and holds Bachelors Degrees from Boston University and MassArt. He attended the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture in 2002. He has been artist-in-residence at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston (2016) and for the City of Boston (2018). He has received grants from The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, and The Art Matters Foundation. Solo exhibitions include, *there is no one left to blame*, curated by Helen Molesworth for the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, *The School of Love with Samsø* (Boston, MA), *Family Pictures* with Gallery Kayafas (Boston, MA and most recently *#Killers at YOURS MINE & OURS* in New York. He has had solo projects with the Boston Public Library, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Mendes Wood in Sao Paulo, Brazil, at VOLTA 5 in Basel, Switzerland and P.S. Satellites-A Project of Prospect IV in New Orleans. His work has been reviewed in ARTFORUM, Art in America, Art New England, JUXTAPOZ, The Boston Globe, and The New Yorker. He joined the faculty at Pratt Institute in New York in the Fall of 2019.