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## Paper Monument: Sandow Birk's *White Out* at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art

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Standing over eight feet tall and six feet wide, a large-scale print by Sandow Birk, *White Out: A Monumental Arch to American History* (2021; fig. 1), towers over the nineteenth-century galleries in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth, Texas. The direct gravure adopts the form of the triumphal arch to reframe US history through the contributions and achievements of Americans of color. From aviator Bessie Coleman to the architect Maya Lin, people and episodes of American history appear intricately carved into every surface of the arch.



Fig. 1. Installation view of Sandow Birk, *White Out: A Monumental Arch to American History* (2021); Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, *Liberty Enlightening the World (Statue of Liberty)* (1894–1901); and Augustus Saint-Gaudens, *Diana of the Tower* (1899) in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth. Photo: © Amon Carter Museum of American Art

At the Carter, *White Out* is installed alongside other works first conceived as public sculpture: Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi's small-scale cast for *Liberty Enlightening the World (Statue of Liberty)* and Augustus Saint-Gaudens's tabletop *Diana of the Tower*. Placed in dialogue with this larger history of American monuments, Birk's print presents a new form of public monument. Its massive scale captures both the expansive chronology—over two millennia—and the magnitude of the achievements represented. As a print, it also offers a

model for a transportable "paper monument," its message transferrable to many contexts and conveyable to many viewers.

*White Out's* installation at the Carter forms part of a broader institutional initiative to reframe and expand the narratives of American art in our permanent collection. In a rotating exhibition program called *Re/Framed*, we integrate new works on paper and photographs throughout the permanent collection, exploring a different theme across the entire museum every six months. The program not only enables us to tap into our deep paper and photo holdings with light-level limitations, but it is also an ongoing curatorial exercise in rethinking our permanent collection and making new connections with recent acquisitions. As a large portion of the Carter's audience is comprised of loyal and returning visitors, it furthermore refreshes the permanent collection for repeat visitors and allows us to be nimble with making connections to current events like the United States' Semiquincentennial.

Within a gallery populated with portraits of the Gilded Age elite, *White Out* prompts us to consider who, and what, has historically been enshrined in our nation's art. Like the pictured visitors who buy tickets and roam the monument's grounds in the lower register of the print, the museum visitor to the Carter also becomes a kind of tourist in the galleries by reading, viewing, and questioning our shared American history.

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