MINNEAPOLIS—(May 23, 2024)—The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) has acquired three landmark works of contemporary art, continuing to enrich its collections with works that reflect diverse cultural perspectives. Will Wilson’s photograph Auto Immune Response No. 5 was included in Mia’s recent exhibition In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now, one of 25 works acquired by the museum from that show. Adding to its recent emphasis on Latin American art is Selva Blanca, by the Argentinian artist collective Chiachio & Giannone—a monumental family portrait made from embroidery, quilting, and applique. And Njideka Akunyili Crosby’s color screenprint “The Beautiful Ones” May Have Arrived is the first example of the celebrated artist’s foray into collaborative printmaking, bringing her signature layering of visual signs to the medium—and was produced by the locally based Highpoint Editions, with which Mia has had a long relationship.

“The acquisition of these three exceptional works by Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Chiachio & Giannone, and Will Wilson further advances Mia’s inclusive collection strategies by representing an array of personal and cultural perspectives and, especially, amplifying the voices of historically underrepresented artists,” said Casey Riley, Mia’s Chair, Global Contemporary Art and Curator of Photography & New Media. “Njideka Crosby’s “The Beautiful Ones” May Have Arrived invites viewers to explore the complexities of cultural identity and the layers of personal memory and history that shape our experiences. Chiachio & Giannone’s Selva Blanca challenges traditional notions of gendered artistry through its intricate embroidery and thought-provoking imagery. And Will Wilson’s Auto Immune Response No. 5 is a powerful commentary on the lasting impact of environmental exploitation on Indigenous communities, urging us to confront the consequences of our actions and work towards a more sustainable and culturally responsible future. We know these works will inspire our visitors to consider the transformative power of art.”

About these new acquisitions:

Njideka Akunyili Crosby’s (b. 1983) “The Beautiful Ones” May Have Arrived (2023) is a color screenprint that exemplifies the artist’s distinctive style, combining dense figurative compositions with layers of personal memory and cultural history. The work is the artist's first collaborative editioned print, created in collaboration with master printer Cole Rogers and his team at Highpoint Editions in Minneapolis. The screenprint is based on Akunyili Crosby’s 2013 acrylic and transfer-on-paper painting “The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born” Might Not Hold True For Much Longer, which marked the beginning of an ongoing series of works with that title—itself derived from Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah’s 1968 debut novel The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born.

Born in Nigeria and based in the United States since the age of sixteen, Akunyili Crosby’s work reflects her transnational identity and the complexity of contemporary experience—her formative years in Nigeria, and her grounding in Western art history. Her work often features figures in familiar domestic settings, engaged in moments of intimacy or reflection that invite interpretation. However, as is the case in Mia’s new acquisition, the works reveal themselves more upon closer inspection, with vibrant
photo-collage areas composed of images from Nigerian pop culture and politics, as well as personal snapshots and advertisements, creating a compelling visual metaphor for the layers of memory and history that inform the present.

In addition to adding a work by Akunyili Crosby to the museum’s collection, this acquisition also continues Mia’s collection-building of works from Highpoint Editions. This includes the 2021 acquisition of the complete archive of works by Highpoint Editions—a 20-year body of work comprised of 310 published prints and multiples, as well as 700 items of ancillary production material from 40 artists, including Carlos Amorales, Julie Buffalohead, Willie Cole, Sarah Crowner, Jim Hodges, Julie Mehretu, Todd Norsten, Chloe Piene, David Rathman, Do Ho Suh, and Dyani White Hawk.

Chiachio & Giannone’s (b. 1969, 1964) Selva Blanca (2013-15) is an important example of the Argentinean artists’ signature style, which combines embroidery, quilting, and appliqué to create captivating portraits and scenes that challenge traditional notions of authorship, gender, and identity. The artists, who live in an open, same sex marriage, have been collaborating since 2003. By employing techniques historically associated with women’s domestic pursuits and labor, Chiachio & Giannone create their own family portraits, often presenting an idealized version of their artistic collaboration and domestic partnership while advocating for a more inclusive portrayal of familial ties and configurations. The acquisition significantly strengthens the museum’s collection of contemporary Latin American art, a relatively new area of focus for Mia.

Selva Blanca is one of the duo’s most ambitious works, intricately designed and richly embroidered. The textile invokes elements of chinoiserie, an 18th-century decorative style inspired by Chinese porcelain, reflecting the artists’ interest in global art history and trade. The work also showcases the depth of their research into relevant source material for the flora, with identifiable tropical species serving as an allusion to the so-called “exotic” origins of their work and their identity as Latin Americans. The small, geometrically patterned rugs scattered throughout the piece pay homage to women artists who worked in textile design, such as Sonia Delaunay and Anni Albers. By deliberately blurring the boundaries of authorship and inclusively celebrating gendered labor, Selva Blanca elevates the art of embroidery.

Will Wilson’s (b. 1969) Auto Immune Response No. 5 (2005) reflects the artist’s commitment to centering the histories and contemporary perspectives of Indigenous peoples. Wilson is a citizen of the Navajo Nation, where he grew up—and which significantly influenced his photographic practice. Much of his work challenges the ‘archival impulse’—the tendency to view historical images of Native peoples as static and unchanging—that is often present in historical representations of Indigenous communities, and carried forward by contemporary presentations of these older images. Instead, Wilson’s work actively engages with the present and future of Indigenous peoples, focusing on themes of environmental activism, cultural survival, and renewal. By addressing the impacts of cultural and environmental change on Indigenous communities, his photography becomes a powerful tool for advocating for the rights and well-being of Native peoples while also celebrating the resilience and adaptability of Indigenous cultures in the face of ongoing challenges.

In Auto Immune Response No. 5, Wilson places himself within a large-scale panoramic photo, invoking the imagery of the Hero Twins who appear in Diné Bahane, the Navajo creation story. The
postapocalyptic future depicted in the photograph references the harmful effects of uranium mining on Diné homelands between 1944 and 1986. The twins, wearing gas masks to protect themselves from the toxic environment, stare directly into the camera with bloodshot eyes as an unknown substance streaks down their faces. The use of the term “autoimmune” suggests that the harmful human interference in the environment is equally detrimental to the human body—and underscores the artist’s commentary on the lasting impact of environmental exploitation on Indigenous communities and the urgent need for action to protect both the land and its people. This work, now in Mia’s collection, was shown in the museum’s recent, groundbreaking exhibition In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now.