

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art Announces the Exhibition Debut of *Crystals in Art: Ancient to Today*

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Image via @anthonyjamesstudio

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art presents the debut of *Crystals in Art: Ancient to Today* on view October 12, 2019 to January 6, 2020. Tickets are available [here](#) for \$12, and general admission is free for members, veterans, and youth ages 18 and under.

Crystals in Art features 75 objects, including artworks, artifacts, and 10 crystal specimens that explore how crystals have captured the human imagination across time, place, and culture, and draw on the links between art, religion, science, and social status. The exhibition presents a wide variety of media from sculpture, photography, etching, drawing, video, mixed-media, and crystals as early tools, ritual objects, jewelry, decorative items, and more. Artworks featured in the exhibition are on loan from museum collections nationwide including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu, CA, the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, among others, and private collections.

Crystals in Art features objects from a 5,000-year period that span the world— from ancient Egyptian figurines, to an engraved rock crystal from first-century Rome, a pendant of a rosary from sixteenth-century Mexico, into modern times with Andy Warhol's screen prints from the 1970s, a 2015 life-sized crystal chandelier by Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei, among others. Contemporary artists included in the exhibition, Olafur Eliasson, Marina Abramović, Jen DeNike, Marilyn Minter, Albrecht Dürer, Cindy Sherman, Judy Chicago, Alexis Arnold, Tacita Dean, Carter Mull, Daniel Arsham, Anthony James, Eric Hilton, and Miya Ando, reveal the persistent allure of the medium of crystal for art making. Visitors will also encounter 10 crystal specimens including a monumental quartz crystal named *The Holy Grail*. Mined in 1931 in west central Arkansas, an area renowned for producing some of the largest and clearest quartz crystals in the world, *The Holy Grail* is the largest crystal cluster ever mined in Arkansas.

Crystal Bridges also partnered with the University of Arkansas and Dr. Tom Paradise, professor of geosciences at the J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences, to lend his expertise on the geology of crystals. Dr Paradise will be leading a free [Discover the Grounds](#) event on Saturday, November 9, where he will discuss the geological formations that set Arkansas apart from other regions of the United States, and lead a walk to our large installation of crystals from Blue Springs, Arkansas.

"Crystals have captivated the human imagination since the beginning of time," said Rod Bigelow, executive director and chief diversity & inclusion officer at Crystal Bridges. "In *Crystals in Art*, we expand our focus on American art to explore the full impact of crystal on monarchs, religious leaders, and artists. This exhibition is distinctive for the museum because Arkansas is the only place in North America where high-quality quartz crystal is mined. This exhibition gives us an opportunity to shine a light on the natural state."

Crystals in Art: Ancient to Today was organized by Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art; co-curated by Lauren Haynes, curator, contemporary art at Crystal Bridges and curator of visual arts at the Momentary, and Joachim Pissarro, Berhad Professor of Art History at Hunter College and Director of the Hunter College Galleries, CUNY/City University of New York.

"This exhibition serves to investigate the surprising role of crystals in the arts through the ages," said Haynes. "We have an opportunity to expand on the dialogue around the relationship between crystals and art and offer new insights."

"As we began research at Crystal Bridges for this exhibition, we discovered endless numbers of possibilities, working through a wealth of crystal artifacts and artworks from around the world," said Pissarro. "However, the wide span of crystals in art featured in this exhibition is really a testimony to the rise and fall of empires under which these artifacts were created, and one could even say that the continuous fascination with crystal serves as a common denominator between different cultural, ethnic, and religious groups."

The exhibition is organized into five sections, each one focusing on a different aspect of crystal and how it has been perceived by various societies across humanity's timeline:

- Section One: Sacred and Transcendent** – The luminous, ethereal, and prismatic qualities of rock crystal have inspired and facilitated spiritual and religious devotion. This section includes crystal artifacts and artworks that speak to the material's connections with transcendence.
- Section Two: Crystal Extravagance** – From ancient China and Egypt to Medieval and Renaissance Europe, royal courts and wealthy patrons commissioned and acquired luxuriously worked pieces made of crystal as symbols of affluence and power. This section features objects from an array of countries and time periods.
- Section Three: Science and Mysticism** – Since ancient times, crystal has played an important role in science, yet its mystical associations continue today. This section explores crystal as both a scientific material and a substance thought by some to have metaphysical properties through photography, sculpture, and more.
- Section Four: Crystalline Form** – In the early twentieth century, Modern artists mined the physical properties of crystal for a variety of avant-garde artistic explorations. Juan Gris and Pablo Picasso pushed the boundaries of perspective, presenting multiple, overlapping points of view in a style that became known as Crystal Cubism. This section explores the artistic influence of the physical properties of crystal, and also contains two subsections:
 - New Ways of Seeing:** Some artists use new materials that mimic crystal in both two- and three-dimensions. This subsection poses the question: why is crystal so special, and how do we differentiate it from other translucent materials like glass, acrylic, resin, or even synthetic, industrial crystal?
 - Crystallized:** Some artists rely upon the image of crystal as it would appear in nature, utilizing it as an agent of preservation. Others imagine growing or embedding crystals in everyday objects. Through creative practice, artists in this gallery disengage crystal from its conventional associations and functions.
- Section Five: Crystal Universe** – Less concerned with the formal properties of crystal, the artists in this section look at how the idea of crystalline refraction can serve as an optic to alter one's personal perceptions—and perhaps erase some of our barriers to enhance our ability to see multiple perspectives.

Highlighted Artists in Crystals in Art:

Albrecht Dürer (1471 – 1528) was a painter and printmaker of the German Renaissance. While he experimented with many art mediums and subjects throughout his life, his work with engravings in the 1510s led him to create *Melencolia I* (1514), displayed in the Science and Mysticism section. In the engraving, a laurel-crowned angel sits dejectedly in the foreground, holding a measuring device and surrounded by woodworking tools while the sands of time pass through an hourglass. Featured prominently in the left center of the image is a crystalline structure that divides the foreground and background of the composition and forms an interruptive barrier.

Since the beginning of her career in Belgrade during the early 1970s, artist **Marina Abramović** has pioneered performance as a visual art form and has included crystal in many of her artworks. Abramović will have two works featured in the exhibition: *Dozing Consciousness* (1997) and *Self Portrait with Quartz Crystal* (2018), which can both be found in the Sacred and Transcendent section. In *Dozing Consciousness*, the provocative still of a woman's lips in a bed of crystals is actually part of a seven-minute video of the woman's face fully emerging from the crystals around her. The clinking noises of the crystals moving around her create a soothing sound. Abramović will be coming to Crystal Bridges for a [Distinguished Speaker lecture](#) on Wednesday, October 30. Tickets are available [here](#).

In her *Crystallized Books* series, a couple of which can be found in the Crystallized subsection, **Alexis Arnold** addresses "the materiality of the book versus the text or content of the book, in addition to commenting on the vulnerability of the printed book." According to her, "the books, frozen with crystal growth, have become artifacts or geologic specimens imbued with the history of time, use, and memory. The series came about after Arnold repeatedly found boxes of discarded books in her neighborhood. Instead of leaving the books, she reimagined them as sculptural objects. Arnold will lead an [Adult Workshop](#) at Crystal Bridges on Sunday, November 10. Tickets are available [here](#).

Opening Week and Programming

The opening week includes the *Crystals in Art* [member preview](#) and [opening lecture](#) on Friday, October 11 featuring co-curator Joachim Pissarro and artists Marilyn Minter and Miya Ando. Throughout the duration of the exhibition, Crystal Bridges is offering a [full roster of programs](#) inspired by the show with several classes that feature *Crystals in Art* artists as the instructors. The exhibition programs include:

- Member Preview** - *Crystals in Art: Ancient to Today*, Friday, October 11, 11 am to 9 pm
- Opening Exhibition Discussion** - *Crystals in Art: Ancient to Today* featuring Joachim Pissarro, Marilyn Minter, and Miya Ando, Friday, October 11, 7 to 8 pm
- Arkansas Crystal Showcase with Avant Mining**, Friday, October 11 through Sunday, October 13, 10 am to 6 pm
- Adult Workshop** - Aluminum and Patina Painting with Miya Ando, Saturday, October 12, 1 to 5 pm
- Distinguished Speaker Series** - Marina Abramović, Wednesday, October 30, 7 to 8 pm
- Film Screening** - *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, Wednesday, November 6, 7 to 9 pm
- Afterschool Art Class** - Crazy for Crystals!, Thursday, November 7, 14, 21, 4 to 5:30 pm
- Homeschool Friday Fun** - Crazy for Crystals!, Friday, November 8, 15, 22, 2 to 3:30 pm
- Spotlight Talk** - Light and Space with artist Gisela Colon, Friday, November 8, 7 to 8 pm
- Discover the Grounds** - Arkansas Crystals with Tom Paradise, Saturday, November 9, 10 to 11:30 am
- Adult Workshop** - Mixed Media with Alexis Arnold, Sunday, November 10, 1 to 5 pm
- Art by the Glass** - Colorful Crystal Canvas, Friday, November 15, 6:30 to 8:30 pm
- Arkansas Crystal Trunk Show with American Gem Company**, Saturday, November 30, 10 am to 6 pm
- Preschool Playdate** - Preschool Rocks!, Thursday, December 12, 11:30 am to 2 pm
- Studio Squad** - Geode Painting (Ages 11-13), Saturday, December 14, 4 to 5:30 pm

In addition, the museum offers resources designed to provide access to enriching art experiences:

- Catalog** - *Crystals in Art* will be accompanied by a 176-page, full-color catalog, published by the University of Arkansas Press, and available in the Museum Store.
- Crystal Filter** - from a shimmering crystalline structure growing across your face, to a scalable, virtual rendition of the Holy Grail, use your smartphone to interact with *Crystals in Art* in a new and exciting way. Follow us on Instagram @crystalbridgesmuseum or like us on Facebook to use our *Crystals in Art* augmented reality filter.
- Crystal Properties** - In the Science and Mysticism section, two large wall panels explore in more depth both the science of crystal (it's physical and geologic properties that have made contributions to developments in science and technology) and the mystical properties linked with contemporary "New Age" practices that associate crystal with healing and spiritualism.
- Crystal Cave** - In the Crystalline Form section, a small gallery (fondly referred to as a "crystal cave") acts as a totally immersive engagement space featuring a timeline of crystal objects throughout time and place to tell the story of crystals in art and science.
- Crystal Touching Station** - A crystal touching station will also be available in the "crystal cave" engagement space. Three good-size crystals will be available for visitors to touch.
- Personal Associations** - A visitor engagement activity in the "crystal cave" asks visitors to share their personal associations with crystal as they have encountered it through popular culture, and especially through the science-fiction and fantasy genres (think *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, *The Dark Crystal*, *Indiana Jones*, and many others). Visitors may write about memories or draw images to leave in the space.

Sponsored by Avant Mining, LLC, James Dyke & Helen Porter, Blakeman's Fine Jewelry, Frank and Pat Bailey, Marybeth and Micky Mayfield, Morris Foundation, Inc., Kyle, Maury and Finn Peterson, and JT and Imelda Rose.

To learn more about *Crystals in Art*, visit the [Crystal Bridges website](#). For news updates, follow Crystal Bridges on the [Blog](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#) #CBcrystals.