



Catholic
Universities
Art
Triennale

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BOSTON
COLLEGE

Boston College is Among Seven Premier Catholic Universities Selected to Present “Exercises in Empathy” Global Exhibition

Inaugural Initiative of Catholic Universities Art Triennial

Commissioned by Dicastery for Culture and Education of the Holy See

CHESTNUT HILL, MA (September 2026) -- Boston College is among seven premier Catholic universities in major cities worldwide selected to host an exhibition on the theme of “Exercises in Empathy.” The exhibitions are part of a global contemporary art series launched by the Catholic Universities Art Triennial (“Art Cut”), commissioned by the Dicastery for Culture and Education of the Holy See.

Boston College, the project’s exclusive North American venue, and one of three Jesuit Universities chosen to take part, will present “Art Cut: Exercises in Empathy: Accompaniment,” which opens on campus September 23 and runs through November 15 in the University’s Burns Library Board of Trustees Room. It is co-curated by BC Associate Professor of Studio Art Sheila Gallagher, an interdisciplinary artist and curator whose work explores belief, grief, and our relationships with objects and memory.

The triennial brings together universities from around the world dedicated to exploring how art plays a role in addressing today’s most relevant issues. Its inaugural edition, “Art Cut: Exercises in Empathy,” begins on August 27 in Rio de Janeiro and expands globally. The curatorial program features emerging and established artists, challenging them to reflect on contemporary issues. Empathy is approached as a human capacity to be exercised, cultivated, and shared through artistic experience.

“BC welcomes this opportunity and we are honored to be a part of this global project and to highlight the work of artists who help us to see how, like us, they want to raise up those we meet around and before us,” said Boston College Vice Provost for Global Engagement James F. Keenan, S.J., Canisius Professor of Theology and Jesuit Institute director. He cited the significance of BC’s participation “with other universities at the forefront of Catholic higher education, working together with the Church.” Fr. Keenan received the invitation for BC to participate in “Art Cut” from José Cardinal Tolentino de Mendonça, Prefect of the Vatican Dicastery on Culture and Education; each institution will present an exhibition central its defining theme of empathy, with a focus on human connection, ethics, and mutual recognition.

"We wanted a distinctively Jesuit trait and chose 'Accompaniment' as our exhibition theme," Fr. Keenan explained. "That we are the only university from North America makes our theme particularly significant. Following Pope Leo, we see a need to highlight how in a world of conflict, accompaniment suggests that our first stance toward another is not to be scorn or suspicion, but rather an occasion for meeting and walking together." BC educates "men and women for others," who go beyond themselves to meet and accompany the abandoned, overlooked, and marginalized on their journey, organizers note.

Boston College: "Art Cut: Exercises in Empathy: Accompaniment"

"'Accompaniment' is an exercise in empathy and a key feature of healing, whether emotional, spiritual, physical, or cultural, which closes the distance between ourselves and others," said Gallagher. "The works of the participating artists [detailed below] cultivate connection, care, and compassion and sound contemporary art's call to attention. Accompaniment redefines the artist's labor as a form of 'keeping company' as they present their socially engaged work in this project." She hopes viewers "have an art experience which moves them beyond intellectual engagement into a more affective realm of companionship and proximity, to make connections between the diverse works in the exhibition." The installation in the stained glass, light-filled space in Burns Library offers an inspiring venue, she noted.

"This is a great moment in history when the Church recognizes the power of contemporary art in fostering an ethics of care for vulnerable members of the human family. It is a great honor that BC is collaborating with the Holy See to shine a light on how art can forge connections with secular culture and communicate spiritual truths. I hope the exhibition brings a greater appreciation for the role that visual artists can play in protecting the human spirit.

Boston College Featured Artists (For BC exhibition-related events: events.bc.edu)

LISA ELMALEH (United States)

Nine works from "Promised Land/Tierra Prometida"

An American photographer, artist, and humanitarian, Elmaleh specializes in large-format photography. Nine works will be shown from her most recent body of work, "Promised Land/Tierra Prometida," which engages with and challenges mainstream media immigration images and narratives. She traveled the U.S.-Mexican border to document and volunteer with humanitarian aid organizations; her borderland perspective is told through images which focus on the humanity and experiences of asylum seekers and those providing food, shelter, health care, and support.

SIDIVAL FILA (Brazil)

Seven new works (two "paintings" and five sculptures):

A Franciscan friar who heads a philanthropic foundation, his artistic practice—reworking antique and discarded fabrics such as linen, silk, cotton, and brocade—explores memory, redemption, and the transformation of matter, turning forgotten textiles into abstract compositions. Deeply connected to ritual and reflection, his work often sits at the threshold between sacred and secular. The exhibition is his first New England showing of his work.

JEREMY FREY (United States)

Baskets, flatweave, video "Ash, 2023"

A basket maker, Frey is one of the foremost Passamaquoddy craftspeople of his generation. He harvests materials and weaves baskets using ancestral techniques. His 2025 retrospective, *Jeremy Frey: Woven*, toured museums around the country. The video "Ash, 2023" will be presented. Frey also will speak at BC on September 30 as part of the University's Lowell Humanities Series. (Free, registration required: www.bc.edu/lowell)

SÓNIA GOMES (Brazil)

11 fabric works (including new works)

A Brazilian contemporary artist, Gomes employs found objects and textiles in her works, twisting, stretching, and bundling them to fashion wiry or knotty sculptural forms. The new works on display include a new version of a site-specific installation.

Additional Video works and Artist's Book in Exhibition

BÁRBARA WAGNER & BENJAMIN DE BURCA (BRAZIL)

RISE (2018)

"RISE" (2018) is an experimental short film and video installation by Brazilian artist duo Bárbara Wagner and Benjamin de Burca. The work blends documentary and musical styles to explore identity, migration, and self-representation.

SR. CORITA KENT (1918-1986, United States)

Documentary

An artist whose vibrant serigraphs reflected her concerns about poverty, racism, and war, her social justice messages continue to resonate today. The 1965 documentary "Mary's Day" captures the famous, pop-art inspired Mary's Day procession on the campus of Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles in 1964, where she taught.

LUCKY PIERRE (United States)

Video (artist collaborative): "Final Meals"

A performance and video installation, "Final Meals" documents the preparation and consumption of last meal requests of death row inmates made public by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice since 1982, and films the participants as they eat. The video centers on food as a final act of human comfort and physical care. On October 27, Lucky Pierre will work with volunteers to prepare a meal for BC community members who are involved in prison justice and ministry, and will give a presentation/discussion on the project.

DEB TODD WHEELER (United States)

Book of Walks (2024)

The Boston artist's *Book of Walks* is a poetic document which recounts a selection of some 300 grief walks she choreographed. These one-on-one actions of mourning and accompaniment involved listening to geo-located music, sounds, and songs. It includes a QR code to access the related audio. On November 2, she will lead a community-sung meditation of remembrance to celebrate All Souls Day in the Memorial Labyrinth outside of Burns Library.

MANTHIA DIAWARA (Mali)

Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation (2009)

Malian writer, filmmaker, cultural theorist, and scholar, Diawara's 2009 film "Édouard Glissant: One World in Relation" follows the French writer, poet, and philosopher on a transatlantic journey as he discusses his philosophies of creolization, relation, and history.

"Art Cut: Exercises in Empathy": This international arts initiative proposes artworks as devices of empathy, and brings together a global network of artists, curators, and Catholic universities to explore empathy as a practice of attention, imagination, and coexistence—as a prism to reflect on human relationships and our shared responsibility through art.

The Vatican appointed art critic and Professor Nuno Crespo, Dean and Director of the School of Arts at the Universidade Catolica Portuguesa, to curate and coordinate the seven university exhibitions. A selection of works from each venue will culminate in an exhibition curated by Crespo in Venice in 2028.

In addition to Boston College, other university participants are Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (Chile), Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Colombia), Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan (Italy), Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Lisbon (Portugal), Universidade Católica de Angola, Luanda (Angola).

According to Crespo's curatorial statement, this triennial "presents itself as a moral laboratory in which a series of exercises are proposed, where each work, each exhibition and each artist leads us towards collective practices of empathy that are aesthetic, ethical, human, political and social. The enormous ambition of our 'School of Empathy' is proportional to the scale of the upheavals that human societies and cultures have undergone...It is a project that finds in works of art empathic devices that need to be activated...because within them lies the possibility of deinstalling the growing de-humanisation we see coming towards us...Art, as a school in which this greater knowledge of the other

can be exercised, allows our speech acts to be heard and enables us, in response to Pope Leo XIV's appeal, to remain human."

"Art Cut 2026" Dicastery for Culture and Education Press Kit: For more information including the exhibition schedule: <https://www.dce.va/en/PRESS/press-kit/artcut-20261.html>

Art Cut: Catholic Universities Triennial: In the Encyclical *Magnifica humanitas*, Pope Leo XIV encourages universities to engage creatively with the complexity of today's challenges and to commit themselves "to mak[ing] the life of our societies more just and fraternal" (MH, no. 47). The Catholic Universities Art Triennial seeks to respond positively to this appeal and to deepen this public debate on safeguarding what is fundamentally human, according to organizers.

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