



**Above:** Nicolaes Berchem, *A Moor Offering a Parrot to a Lady*, c. 1660-70. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1961.29.



*This program is presented by The Lewis Walpole Library at Yale University in partnership with the Wadsworth Atheneum and The Amistad Center for Art & Culture. Additional support provided by the Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation Fund at the Wadsworth Atheneum. The Walpole Library's exhibition, The Paradox of Pearls: Accessorizing Identities in the Eighteenth Century, is on view from September 27, 2024 through January 31, 2025.*

**Front Cover:** Detail, Nicolaes Berchem, *A Moor Offering a Parrot to a Lady*, c. 1660-70. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1961.29.

## Public Lecture *Pearl Drops and Blackamoors with Adrienne L. Childs*

October 10, 2024 • 6pm

Yale *Lewis Walpole Library*



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM  
MUSEUM OF ART

The **Amistad** Center  
for **Art & Culture**



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM  
MUSEUM OF ART

## Pearl Drops and Blackamoors: The Black Body and Pearlescent Adornment in European Art with Dr. Adrienne L. Childs

October 10, 2024 • 6pm • Avery Theater, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Art historian and curator Adrienne L. Childs, PhD, is one of the leading experts on race and representation in the visual arts. Her recent research and forthcoming publication *Ornamental Blackness: The Black Figure in European Decorative Arts* (Yale University Press, 2025) examines how objects ranging from furniture and porcelain to silver and light fixtures conveyed the taste for exoticism in historic European art and portrayed the laboring Black body in the guise of décor. These objects also express larger ideas about the concept of race, romantic notions of distant lands, the harsh realities of slave labor in the colonies, the presence of Black servants in wealthy European households, and the culture of luxury consumption. In tonight's lecture, Dr. Childs turns to the pearl as a focus in response to the Lewis Walpole Library's exhibition, *The Paradox of Pearls: Accessorizing Identities in the Eighteenth Century*, curated by Dr. Laura Engel of Duquesne University. Dr. Childs traces how European artists of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries often depicted Black figures wearing pearl ornaments, and explores the complexities of subjugating and enslaving Black bodies in one context while using their images to showcase luxuries in another.



**Above:** Attributed to Stephen Slaughter, *Portrait of Two Women*, 1730s–1740s. Oil on canvas. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1987.1.

**Opposite:** Dr. Adrienne L. Childs, photograph courtesy of the scholar.

## About the Lecturer



**Adrienne L. Childs**, PhD, is an independent scholar, art historian, and curator. She is Senior Consulting Curator at The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. and the Distinguished Senior Scholar at the Lauder Research Center for Modern Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Her current book project is an exploration of Black figures in European decorative arts entitled *Ornamental Blackness: The Black Figure in European Decorative Arts*, forthcoming from Yale University Press. She is currently co-curator of *Vivian Browne: My Kind of Protest* for The Phillips Collection and recently co-curated *The Colour of Anxiety: Race, Sexuality and Disorder in Victorian Sculpture*

at The Henry Moore Institute in Leeds, England. She was the guest curator of *Riffs and Relations: African American Artists and the European Modernist Tradition* at The Phillips Collection in 2020. In April 2022 The High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia awarded Dr. Childs the 2022 Driskell Prize in recognition of her contribution to African American art and art history. Dr. Childs co-curated *The Black Figure in the European Imaginary* at The Cornell Fine Arts Museum at Rollins College in 2017. She is co-editor of the volume essays *Blacks and Blackness in European Art of the Long Nineteenth Century*, Routledge. She also contributed an essay on art and activism to Volume V, Part II of *The Image of the Black in Western Art* edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and David Bindman. As former curator at the David C. Driskell Center at the University of Maryland she curated many exhibitions including *Her Story: Lithographs by Margo Humphrey*; *Arabesque: The Art of Stephanie Pogue*; *Creative Spirit: The Art of David C. Driskell*; and *Tradition Redefined: The Larry and Brenda Thompson Collection of African American Art*. Dr. Childs holds a BA from Georgetown University, an MBA from Howard University, and a PhD in the History of Art from the University of Maryland.

## The Paradox of Pearls

*On view until January 31, 2025 at the Lewis Walpole Library*

Worn as jewelry, as embellishments to the body and dress, or embedded in the settings of precious objects—pearls accessorize, highlight, colonize, and perform. Drawing from materials in the Lewis Walpole Library this exhibition explores the “paradox of pearls” by considering how the varied and often contradictory meanings of this jewel appear in period images and the ways in which practices from the past connect us to the powerful presence of pearls today.