



Stanley Museum of Art

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NEWS RELEASE

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Retrospective Celebrates Legacy of Alumnus Hayward Oubre, Acclaimed Artist and Educator

WWII veteran earned his MFA at the University of Iowa in 1948

Iowa City, Iowa – On August 28, 2025, the Stanley Museum of Art opens the exhibition *Hayward Oubre: Structural Integrity*. Organized by the Birmingham Museum of Art in Alabama, this is the first monographic show devoted to the career of American modernist Hayward L. Oubre Jr. (1916–2006). The exhibition features fifty works of art drawn from prominent public collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art, as well as major collections of African American art.

Born in New Orleans in 1916, Oubre became the first student to earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Dillard University, Louisiana’s oldest HBCU (historically Black colleges and universities). While pursuing postgraduate studies at Atlanta University, Oubre absorbed the influences of artists Hale Woodruff (1900–1980) and Nancy Elizabeth Prophet (1890–1960). He enlisted in the US Army in 1941 and, as part of the all-Black 97th Engineering Regiment, played a role in constructing the Alaska-Canadian Highway. Following his military service, Oubre and his wife, Juanita, enrolled at the University of Iowa.

“This exhibition celebrates the University of Iowa’s rich history as a leader in the creative arts,” said Lauren Lessing, the Stanley Museum of Art’s director. “Our reputation as an inclusive academic environment known for rigorous artistic training drew generations of Black students, including Elizabeth Catlett and Hayward Oubre.”

Oubre is best known for his work with an everyday material—wire coat hangers—which he used to create modernist masterworks that draw on lived experiences, art-historical influences, and current events, including space exploration. Although Oubre is primarily known as a sculptor and printmaker, he also painted throughout his career.

“The breadth of Oubre’s creativity is astonishing,” said Diana Tuite, the Stanley’s visiting senior curator of modern and contemporary art. “He was a painter who moved from an expressive,

realist style to punchy, chromatic abstractions. As a sculptor, he distinguished himself with this turn to industrial materials drawn from modern life.”

Oubre shaped art in the United States not only through his creative work but also as a distinguished educator at two prominent HBCUs. From 1949 to 1965, he served as the first chair of the art department at Alabama State University in Montgomery, and then in 1965 he established the art department at Winston-Salem State University in North Carolina.

“His commitment to building the infrastructure for future generations of Black artists in the South is one reason he never gained the national renown he deserved,” said Tuite. “To this day, many of these histories remain regionally confined. As the only venue for the show outside of the South, we are excited to bring Oubre’s work to wider audiences.”

Hayward Oubre: Structural Integrity will be accompanied by a focused installation exploring the early years of the University of Iowa’s studio MFA program. *In the Studio: Art at Iowa in the 1940s* places Oubre in the context of faculty and students such as Mauricio Lasansky, Philip Guston, Miriam Schapiro, and Houston Ellis Chandler.

Hayward Oubre: Structural Integrity is accompanied by a richly illustrated publication edited by Katelyn D. Crawford, the William Cary Hulsey Curator of American Art at the Birmingham Museum of Art and the exhibition curator. The show will travel to the New Orleans Museum of Art, where it will be on view from January 16 through May 3, 2026.

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Hayward Oubre: Structural Integrity is organized by the Birmingham Museum of Art. Presented with generous support from the Terra Foundation for American Art, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and the Henry Luce Foundation. Lead support for the exhibition catalogue provided by the Wyeth Foundation for American Art. At the University of Iowa, it is supported by the Beth and Nate Tross Stanley Museum of Art Support Fund, the Members Special Exhibition Fund, and an anonymous donor.

About the University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art

The University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art is a leading university art museum that serves as a focal point for members of the public as well as a multi-disciplinary tool and creative hub for students across campus. The Stanley has one of the most important university-owned art collections in the country, including significant holdings of African art, 20th-century painting and sculpture, works on paper, textiles, and ceramics. Their world-class collection began with acquisitions made in the 1930s to support the nation’s first Master of Fine Arts program. The collection continued to evolve as generations of UI faculty and students, including Grant Wood, Elizabeth Catlett, Miriam Schapiro, Philip Guston, and Ana Mendieta, shaped the field of American art.

For more information, visit stanleymuseum.uiowa.edu.

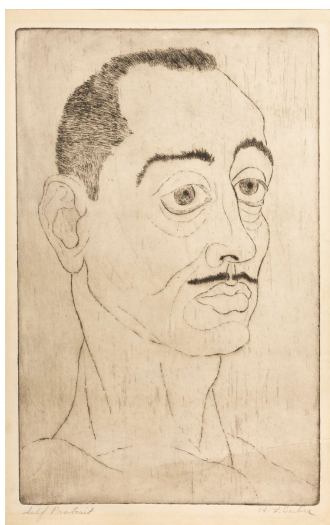
Hayward Oubre: Structural Integrity

August 26, 2025 – December 7, 2025

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ARTWORK IMAGE SHEET

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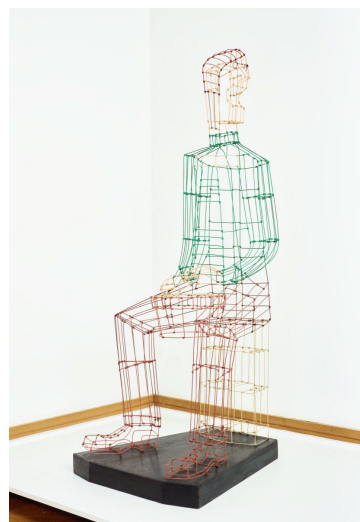
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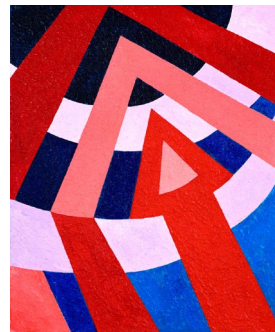




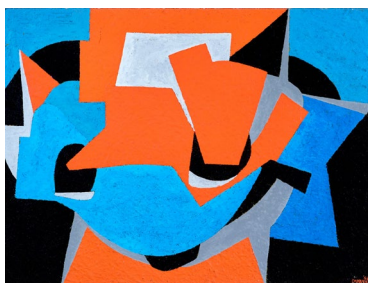
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ARTWORK IMAGE CAPTIONS

1. Hayward L. Oubre, Jr. (American, 1916–2006), *Self-Portrait*, 1948, etching and drypoint on paper, 26 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (framed). The Paul R. Jones Collection of American Art at The University of Alabama, PJ2008.0925, image credit: Lily Brooks
2. Hayward L. Oubre, Jr. (American, 1916–2006), *Stevedore*, 1945, black painted plaster with wood base, 14 x 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 13 in. Studio Museum in Harlem; Gift of Michael Rosenfeld and Halley K. Harrisburg, 2003.2.6
3. Hayward L. Oubre, Jr. (American, 1916–2006), *Wilted*, oil on canvas, 40 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 24 in. The Johnson Collection, Spartanburg, South Carolina
4. Hayward L. Oubre, Jr. (American, 1916–2006), *Pensive Family*, oil on canvas, 38 x 24 in. Larry D. and Brenda A. Thompson Collection
5. Hayward L. Oubre, Jr. (American, 1916–2006), *Space Rhythms*, 1960, painted metal wire on wood base, 41 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 17 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 22 in. The Johnson Collection, Spartanburg, South Carolina
6. Hayward L. Oubre, Jr. (American, 1916–2006), *Bongo Drummer*, about 1960, painted steel wire on wood base, 64 x 25 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. Collection of the Birmingham Museum of Art; Museum purchase, 2021.75, image credit: Erin Croxton
7. Hayward L. Oubre, Jr. (American, 1916–2006), *Young Horse*, about 1957, 60 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. The Hayward Oubre Estate, Courtesy of Debra Force Fine Art, image credit: John Woo
8. Hayward L. Oubre, Jr. (American, 1916–2006), *Equilibrium*, 1969, acrylic and acrylic resin on canvas, 30 x 24 in., Collection of Carla and Cleophus Thomas, Jr., image credit: Erin Croxton
9. Hayward L. Oubre, Jr. (American, 1916–2006), *A Missile Breaking the Sound Barrier Causing Sonic Booms*, 1961, acrylic and acrylic resin on canvasboard, 26 x 22 x 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Collection of Norm and Carnetta Davis, image credit: Erin Croxton
10. Hayward L. Oubre, Jr. (American, 1916–2006), *Equivocal Fox*, 1968, oil on board, 24 x 29 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 1 in., Clark Atlanta University Art Museum, Atlanta Annuals: Second Atlanta University Purchase Award for Oils, 1968.004, image credit: Erin Croxton