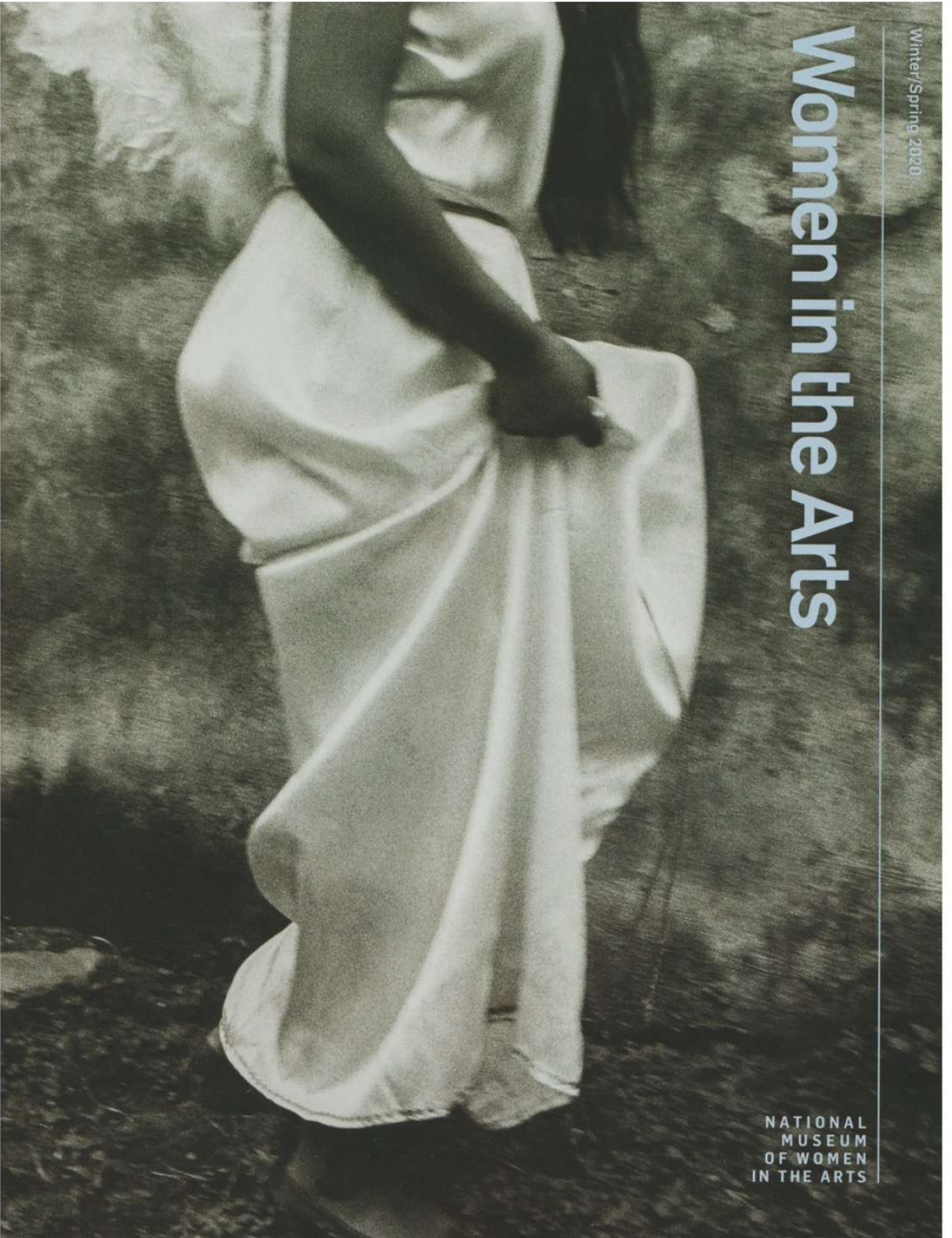


Winter/Spring 2020

Women in the Arts

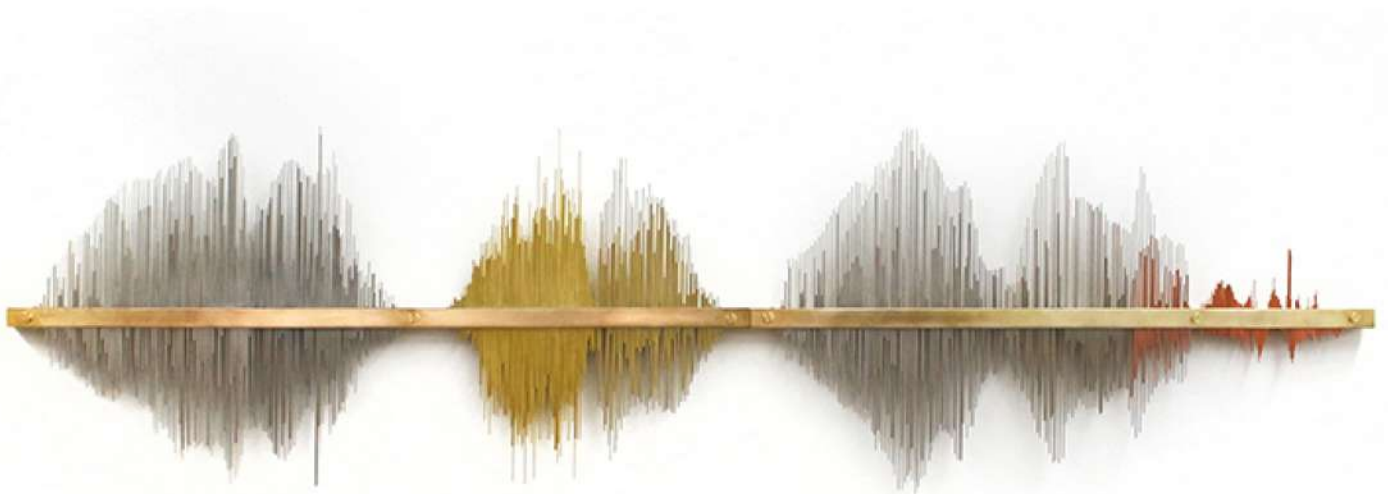
NATIONAL
MUSEUM
OF WOMEN
IN THE ARTS



// RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Charlotte Charbonnel

mille cents millimètres (Lucy) (2019)



// Hannah Shambroom

Charlotte Charbonnel (b. 1980, Maubeuge, France) translates sounds and scientific phenomena into shimmering, three-dimensional forms. Thanks to a new donation from Les Amis du NMWA, the France-based chapter of the museum's extensive network of national and international outreach committees, NMWA brings the distinctive vision of this compelling mixed-media artist to its collection. The brass, stainless steel, nickel, silver, and copper sculpture, titled *mille cents millimètres (Lucy)* (2019), is the first by Charbonnel to be acquired by the museum, though three works by the artist were featured in the recent exhibition *Heavy Metal—Women to Watch 2018*. Charbonnel's

artwork enhances NMWA's holdings of modern and contemporary sculpture, particularly in metal, a medium traditionally dominated by men.

Visualizing Phonic Forms

Using a variety of metals and techniques, Charbonnel blends scientific observation with visual form. She says, "I work with physical forces such as gravity and magnetism in order to make visible the energies that surround us." Her interest in metal is rooted in its transformative qualities. In some sculptures, she defies gravity by suspending iron filings in space using magnetism, revealing the medium's physical mutability. "Because metal can transform from one state to another, it seems almost alive, organic," the artist explains. In other works,

"This work is the result of research on sound visualization and synesthesia . . . as if sound became form."

Charlotte Charbonnel

such as *mille cents millimètres (Lucy)*, the artist focuses on the acoustic properties of elements as well as their physical traits; she cuts, fuses, melts, bends, and magnetizes various metals, giving visual form to sound and seismic waves.

mille cents millimètres (Lucy)

For *mille cents millimètres (Lucy)*, Charbonnel was inspired by Lucy, the approximately 3.2-million-year-old early human ancestor, whose discovery shed light on important aspects of human evolution. Unearthed in Hadar, Ethiopia, in 1974 by paleontologist Donald C. Johanson, Lucy's fossilized remains comprise hundreds of pieces of bone fossils that together represent 40 percent of an early female *Australopithecus afarensis* skeleton—at the time, the most

ancient early hominin ever found. The fossils measure 1,100 millimeters, also the length of Charbonnel's piece.

The sculpture is a visualization of the soundwaves produced by the artist's voice as she pronounces the work's title, the measurement 1,100 millimeters (in French). Composed of a horizontal brass band intersected by 1,100 vertical stainless steel, nickel, silver, and copper rods, the work transcribes sound into expressive physical form. "I wanted to pay tribute to the first woman of humanity, Lucy, and represent her like a spectrum, a vibratory body in a horizontal position, like a recumbent statue," Charbonnel says. "This work is the result of research on sound visualization and synesthesia . . . as if sound became form."

A Woman to Watch

Charbonnel was selected to represent the French committee in *Heavy Metal*, the fifth installment of NMWA's *Women to Watch* exhibition series, in 2018. *Women to Watch* exhibitions result from a collaboration between the museum and its supporting committees around the world. For *Heavy Metal*, Les Amis du NMWA worked with Alicia Knock, a curator at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, to create a shortlist of contemporary artists in France working in metal. From these nominations, NMWA Associate Curator Virginia Treanor chose three works by Charbonnel; the exhibition marked the first time the artist's work was exhibited in the United States. Treanor was intrigued by Charbonnel's visualization of concepts that combine art and science. For one piece

shown in the exhibition, *Train End* (2016), Charbonnel transcribed the soundwave of an unidentified deep-sea tone by fusing together stainless steel rods and a contour gauge (a tool used to measure and record the cross-sectional shape of a surface). She used a similar approach in *mille cents millimètres (Lucy)*, balancing consideration of visual composition and abstract auditory elements.

The gift from Les Amis du NMWA continues the committee's generous history of donating works by *Women to Watch* artists to the museum's collection. The committee has also gifted works by Laure Tixier and François Pétrovitch, whose art was featured in *Women to Watch* exhibitions in 2013 and 2015, respectively.

NMWA's robust collection of metalwork includes historic

silver—serving platters, utensils, salvers, and more, dating as far back as the late seventeenth century—as well as modern and contemporary sculptures by standout artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Lynda Benglis, Frida Baranek, Dorothy Dehner, and others. This vibrant variety of historic and contemporary work dispels the traditional perception of metalworking as the purview of men and gives museum visitors more to discover. The acquisition of Charbonnel's work highlights a new aspect of the versatility and ingenuity of women working in this medium, who demonstrate their mastery of metal in all its transformative states.

// Hannah Shambroom is the exhibition coordinator at the National Museum of Women in the Arts.