



Madonna II

Date

1992

Primary Maker

Elizabeth Catlett

Medium

Screen print

Description

Elizabeth Catlett was born in Washington, DC, attended Howard University, and, after graduating in 1935, worked as a teacher for two years in the Durham, North Carolina, public schools. She then attended graduate school at the University of Iowa, where she studied with the American painter Grant Wood. Catlett became increasingly interested in sculpture, however, and in 1940 received the university's first master of fine arts degree to be awarded in the field. One of the works in her thesis exhibition was titled *Negro Mother and Child*—a theme that would continue in her work throughout her life. In both sculpture and printmaking, Catlett explored Black subjects. *Madonna II* references traditional images of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child as well as African mother-and-child compositions even as it delves into the relationship between two and three dimensions, presenting its human forms as articulated by somewhat abstracted planes. In addition, at the bottom, parts of both figures spill out of the picture plane into the

print's black border, breaching the viewer's space, much as in *Madonna and Child* images by Renaissance painters such as the Venetian Giovanni Bellini. Here, the plasticity of the figures is countered by the flatness of the garments and the splattered background, which references both the gilded backgrounds of medieval religious icons and the gestural paintings of the Abstract Expressionists. *Madonna II* was printed at Workshop, Inc., by Lou Stovall, an artist in his own right who founded the studio in Washington, DC, in 1968. There, he has acted as a master printer for a number of prominent artists, including Sam Gilliam and Jacob Lawrence, in addition to Catlett. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, *INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS*, 2017)

Dimensions

Image: 21 3/16 x 15 1/16 in. (53.8 x 38.3 cm) Sheet: 21 15/16 x 15 13/16 in. (55.7 x 40.2 cm)