



ALISON SAAR

American, b. 1956

*Cotton Eater II*, 2014

Woodcut print on paper

Friends of Art Acquisition Fund, 2015.15

## Cotton Eater II



**Alison Saar** (b. 1956) Born and raised in the Los Angeles area, Alison Saar has art in her blood. Her parents, Betye Saar, a well-known African American artist, and Richard Saar, an art conservationist, inspired her to become a sculptor. Saar earned her BA from Scripps College in 1978 and her MFA from the Otis Art Institute in 1981. As a mixed-race woman, Saar focuses her artwork on issues of identity and spirituality. Inspired by various cultural mythologies, she uses a wide array of materials to construct her own storytelling devices that deal with the most human of subject matter: fertility, parenthood, and birthing, as well as political issues of racial and gender identity and equality.

### A product of its time

Alison Saar created *Cotton Eater II* during a time in the United States where the poor and working classes felt marginalized by extreme wealth and corporate influence, as evidenced by the Occupy Wall Street movement that began in 2011 and a lingering criticism of the government's response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Nine years later, at the time this print was made, the Lower Ninth Ward (a predominately black New Orleans neighborhood) had still not recovered from the devastation.

### Take a closer look

Inspired by the Greek myth of the Lotus-Eaters that appears in Homer's *The Odyssey* and perhaps Vincent Van Gogh's painting, *The Potato Eaters*, Saar depicts a poor, African American woman eating cotton. *Cotton Eater II* also references the slave labor in the cotton fields of the old South. The eating of the cotton, as alluded to by Van Gogh, is a pacification of the poor—a distraction or bone for them to chew on. The Lotus-Eaters in *The Odyssey* eat themselves into a narcotic trance of apathy. Saar cleverly combines these meanings to comment on the contemporary status of people of color in the US.

### Did you know?

In high school, Alison Saar assisted her father in some of his restoration work. Restoring artifacts from different cultures like Chinese frescoes, Egyptian mummies, and pre-Columbian and African art enabled Saar to learn about the properties of various materials, techniques, and aesthetics.

Alison Saar's solo exhibition, *Still...*, traveled from the Otis College of Art and Design (2012) to the Figge Art Museum (2013) and beyond. *Still...* was on display at the Figge from February 9–April 14, 2013.

### On your own

[www.lalouver.com/html/artist.cfm?tArtist\\_id=263](http://www.lalouver.com/html/artist.cfm?tArtist_id=263)

[www.phylliskindgallery.com/artists/as/index.html](http://www.phylliskindgallery.com/artists/as/index.html)

[www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/alison-saar-](http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/alison-saar-)

[artweek.la/issue/september-2-2013/article/alison-saar-slough](http://artweek.la/issue/september-2-2013/article/alison-saar-slough)