Letter from the Director

When The Studio Museum in Harlem was founded in 1968, the diverse group of artists, community activists, and philanthropists at its helm wrote, \"We have chosen Harlem as the place for this more experimental, less institutionalized Museum because of the sense of newness, strength, and change which is present there.\"

I've been thinking a lot about these three ideals—newness, strength, and change—at this incredibly transformative moment in the life of the Studio Museum. We are at a time of monumental change, as we prepare to construct a new home here on 125th Street. The 1914 bank and office building brilliantly adapted for us in 1982 by renowned architect J. Max Bond Jr. will be succeeded by a completely new structure designed expressly for the Museum—and for you, our visitors, neighbors, artists, and friends—by Adjaye Associates and Cooper Robertson.

As we prepare for all this newness and change, we are looking deeply at what has been the greatest strength of the Studio Museum for the past fifty years: our support for artists of African descent and the ways in which their work can inform, engage, and inspire a broad and diverse public. While the Museum’s galleries are closed, we are committed to continuing this work through inHarlem, a dynamic set of collaborative programs in the amazing neighborhood we are honored to call home.

We are continuing our groundbreaking exhibitions, thought-provoking conversations, and engaging art-making workshops at a variety of partner and satellite locations in Harlem, including New York Public Library branches, the Maysles Documentary Center, NYC Parks, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and more.

In this spirit, Studio takes a special focus on Harlem. You’ll read about the exhibitions Firelei Báez: Joy Out of Fire and Maren Hassinger: Monuments, but also the Museum’s Community Advisory Network; our 2018 artists in residence, now working at Studio Museum 127 (the Museum’s street-level space at 429 West 127th Street); the Langston Hughes House; films inspired by the neighborhood; artwork in Harlem’s 125th Street subway station; and stories from many artists, students, and friends in the neighborhood.

Finally, in this issue we remember Holly Block, Peggy Cooper Cafritz, Kynaston McShine, and Jack Whitten.

They were all important members of the Studio Museum family and will be truly missed.

Our bright future is only possible because of the great devotion of this Museum family, our many supporters, and our neighborhood. Harlem continues to be a place of unparalleled “newness, strength, and change.” We are so grateful.

I look forward to seeing you soon, in Harlem!

Thelma Golden
Director and Chief Curator

Photo: Julie Skarratt
What Are They Made of There?
A Legacy Meets New Beginnings
Practice in Print: Kayode Ojo
New Folk
Hearing Harlem

Walking inHarlem with the Second Grade
DIY Grow Your Own Crystals
Above and Beyond ETW
Building a New Home
Profiles in Genius
Gala 2017
Member Spotlight Kathleen Adams

Global Council
Studio Museum Heads South
Recent Acquisitions
Emerging Artists, Young and Old
In Memoriam
Supporters
Members
Membership Information
Visitor Information
Exhibition Schedule

On View
May 1–September 29, 2018
Firelei Báez: Joy Out of Fire

On View
June 16, 2018–June 10, 2019
Maren Hassinger: Monuments

Always on View
Harlem Postcards

Check studiomuseum.org for the latest on our exhibitions and programs.
Firelei Báez: Joy Out of Fire features women whose legacies are maintained and preserved by the archives of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. The exhibition sees Báez continue to meditate on her long-standing interest in representation, through imaginative portraits of Afro-Caribbean/Afro-Latina women who made their mark on the twentieth century as artists, authors, activists, entertainers, educators, and public officials.

The works reimage these important figures in conversation with each other, and celebrate the complex histories of notable black women across two centuries.

In creating Joy Out of Fire, Báez selected each subject after interviewing six archivists from the Schomburg Center. Working closely with library and Schomburg staff, she researched the lives of women whose archives are housed there, such as Maya Angelou, Jean Blackwell Hutson, and Ada “Bricktop” Smith, and explored additional archival holdings to find insights into other figures, such as Oprah, Maritcha Remond Lyons, and Shirley Graham Du Bois. The resulting portraits on view are both figurative and conceptual; Báez painstakingly combined many different sources of information, from letters to diaries to photographs, to form the dynamic works and mirror the many important contributions each figure made to society. The intricate new works incorporate materials from reproductions of archival photographs to the handwriting of women in the archive.

“I wanted to bring in as much of each woman’s physical trace as possible,” says Báez, “for the viewer to be immersed physically ... the longer look is what will reveal more information in each work.”

Although the portraits will evoke the lives of individual women—especially women whose stories Báez wants to bring out of obscurity—they will not be portrait likenesses in the conventional sense. Rather, the ensemble will create a celebratory space in the gallery of the Schomburg Center, imparting the joy that these extraordinary women brought out of the tumult of their lives, as they shared their concerns and ideas and gave one another support and inspiration across generations. The title, Joy Out of Fire, is a reference to the incredible accomplishments of these women, in the face of extreme odds. In honoring these powerful women, each work is arranged on the perimeter of the gallery, across from selections from their archives, to create a reflective space within the Schomburg Center.

This exhibition is part of the Studio Museum’s inHarlem initiative. Now its third year, inHarlem is designed to explore innovative ways to engage the community while taking the Museum beyond its walls, and encompasses a growing range of dynamic exhibitions and programs.

Firelei Báez: Joy Out of Fire is organized by Hallie Ringle, Assistant Curator, The Studio Museum in Harlem.

Opposite: Firelei Báez in her studio
Photo: SaVonne Anderson

Above: Archival material from the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
Photo: SaVonne Anderson
Maren Hassinger
Monuments
This summer, The Studio Museum in Harlem will open its second iteration of the Museum’s *inHarlem* parks projects, in collaboration with the artist Maren Hassinger. The annual parks projects feature specially commissioned, site-specific public artworks in Harlem’s outdoor spaces. *Maren Hassinger: Monuments* will take the form of eight site-specific sculptures installed for approximately one year in Marcus Garvey Park, beginning in June 2018.

Hassinger is a Harlem-based multidisciplinary artist whose work—spanning performance, installation, sculpture, and video—is often a meditation on nature and community. Working in the tradition of her earlier projects, such as *Wreath* (1979), Hassinger will use branches to create eight forms that respond to aspects of the park’s landscape: a rock outcropping, a triangle near flowerbeds, and an oval near the pool. Each sculpture is meant to provide a contemplative moment, one that invites multiple responses that may call forth memories or associations for those who encounter them. Her work often combines abstract qualities and natural forms, and encourages viewers to consider their relationship to their surroundings.

Throughout her career, Hassinger has often resorted to organic and industrial materials to form intricate sculptures and public art installations that mirror the natural world. This bridging of art and life through her use of the discarded and cast-off underlies a practice intent on addressing questions of race, gender, and identity in a playful, irreverent way.

The sculptures that comprise *Monuments* vary from the inaugural iteration of the *inHarlem* parks projects in that the works are comprised of elements from the public space in which they reside. Minimal fabricated or manufactured materials will be brought into the environment.

Hassinger’s work often considers nature as a space both physical and psychological, and elicits the audience to consider the place of nature in their lives. A longtime Harlem resident who regards Marcus Garvey Park as her neighborhood green space, she will create the works with the assistance of a multigenerational team of volunteers.

Hassinger has a long history of working with the Studio Museum, beginning when she participated in the Artist-in-Residence program in 1983. She has been included in several exhibitions at the Museum, most recently in *30 Seconds off an Inch* (2009–10) and *VideoStudio: Playback* (2011). *Maren Hassinger: Monuments* continues the Museum’s initiative to take on a wide range of artist ventures—from site-specific artist projects to events in historic parks, community spaces, and partner organizations in the Harlem neighborhood.

*Maren Hassinger: Monuments* is organized by Hallie Ringle, Assistant Curator, The Studio Museum in Harlem.

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Opposite: Maren Hassinger working on a maquette for *Monuments* at The Studio Museum in Harlem Photo: SaVonne Anderson

Above: Maren Hassinger *Wreath, 1979* Courtesy the artist Photo: Adam Avila
Introducing the 2018 Artists in Residence
Sable Elyse Smith (b. 1986, Los Angeles) is an interdisciplinary artist, writer, and educator whose practice considers memory and trauma. She works from the archive of her own body to mark the difference between witnessing and watching. “To see,” she writes, “is unbearable.” Her prolific writing practice is intricately woven into her artwork.

Along with large-scale neons comprised of original texts, she authored LANDSCAPES & PLAYGROUNDS in 2017, and her writing has been published in Radical Teacher, Selfish Magazine, Studio, and Affidavit. Smith earned an MFA in design and technology from Parsons School of Design and is now part-time faculty there. She recently served as a visiting critic at Columbia University and is currently a visiting artist at Virginia Commonwealth University. She lives and works in Richmond, Virginia. Smith’s work has been presented at institutions such as MoMA PS1, the New Museum, the Queens Museum, and, recently, The Studio Museum in Harlem, where she was one of nineteen emerging artists included in the Museum’s fifth “F” show, Fictions.

What are you most looking forward to in the Studio Museum residency?
I’m looking forward to the unknown, the thing that I know will happen that I can’t predict—the surprise, the push—and the many rich conversations. I have some ideas of the work I want to make during the residency, and I’m looking forward to seeing how the context pushes that.

What has changed about your practice in the last year?
This past year I’ve been thinking a lot about architectural scale and how certain objects, interventions, or specific gestures dominate space and choreograph bodies. I’m always making in response to spaces in those sort of subtle, idiosyncratic ways that are poetic to me, like my own inside joke, but more recently I’ve been directly dealing with the materiality of that “scale.”

Describe Harlem to someone who has never been.
My friend Simone says Harlem feels like the South. I agree with that. We met in Atlanta about ten years ago, so it’s a particular type of feeling I think we’re both conjuring. Harlem feels like home, even when you don’t know anyone on the streets. That’s really lovely to me. And then it vibrates. I’m happy to be back.
Allison Janae Hamilton (b. 1984, Lexington, Kentucky) is a visual artist working in photography, video, sculpture, installation, and taxidermy. Using land-centered folklore, her family’s own hunting and farming rituals from rural western Tennessee, and passed-down mythologies, she creates immersive spaces that consider the ways that the American landscape activates concepts of “Americana” and the social construction of space.

Specifically, she explores rural concepts of blackness, which she says are “often left out of the visual discourse completely or depicted as archaic, anti-contemporary, and part of a painful past.” Hamilton was born in Kentucky and raised in Florida, and she now lives and works in New York. She received her PhD in American studies from New York University and her MFA in visual arts from Columbia University. She has exhibited at museums and institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, the Jewish Museum, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, Fundación Botín, the Brighton Photo Biennial, and The Studio Museum in Harlem, where she was one of nineteen emerging artists included in the Museum’s fifth “F” show, Fictions.

What are you most looking forward to in the Studio Museum residency?
I’m looking forward to continuing getting to know the Studio Museum community and working alongside two incredible artists—Sable and Tschabalala—whose work I respect and admire.

What has changed about your practice in the last year?
I come from a family where many of the women—my grandmother, great-grandmother, aunts, and elder cousins—have been hunters and farmers. This year, I’ve been exploring these matrilineal connections to land by collaborating with my mother and other relatives in a performative way, mainly in video, sound, and photographs.

Describe Harlem to someone who has never been.
It’s America.
Tschabalala Self (b. 1990, Harlem) makes syncretic use of painting, printmaking, and assemblage to explore ideas surrounding black female bodies. Constructed with a combination of sewn, printed, and painted materials, her exaggerated depictions of figures traverse a variety of artistic and craft traditions. But the work is not “about being black—it’s about these people who just happen to be black,” she said in an interview with *W Magazine* last January.

The physiological and psychological characteristics of her figures reflect her personal desire to articulate cultural attitudes and realities as they relate to race and gender, through people who exist but may not always have been represented. Self lives and works in New York and New Haven, Connecticut. She received her MFA from Yale University and her work has been included in exhibitions at Tramway in Glasgow, the New Museum, and The Studio Museum in Harlem (*A Constellation*, 2015–16).

**What are you most looking forward to in the Studio Museum residency?**
I am most looking forward to having the opportunity to work and create within the neighborhood where I was raised. Harlem has shaped my personality, worldview, tastes, and aesthetic. I’m extremely thankful to come home and create within my community.

**What has changed about your practice in the last year?**
My practice has become more concerned with my personal history rather than my personal feelings. I have a greater interest in unpacking the nuances of the communities and environments I have physically been placed within, rather than more esoteric concerns surrounding the psyche.

**Describe Harlem to someone who has never been.**
Black Mecca.

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Opportunity:

Tschabalala Self

*Ice Cream*, 2017

Courtesy Thierry Goldberg Gallery

Above:

Photo: Katie McCurdy
Diedra Harris-Kelley

*Playhouse Collage*
*with Monk – 118th St., 2017*

Courtesy the artist
Marilyn Nance

AFRO PICK, 2017
Courtesy the artist
© Marilyn Nance
Andre D. Wagner

*Harlem Girls – Harlem, NY 2017, 2017*

Courtesy the artist
Gordon Parks

Untitled, Harlem, New York, 1963, 1963
Courtesy The Gordon Parks Foundation
Harlem Postcards

Diedra Harris-Kelley
Diedra Harris-Kelley’s paintings explore a fascination with figurative elements, masking, and the ritual of seeing. Her concept of “a head that rolls and gathers moss” speaks to her preoccupation with forms that collage and morph. There is play with silhouette, and seeing two forms through one—what she calls “twofoldness.” In *Playhouse Collage with Monk – 118th St.*, the artist zeros in on a grid of frames, hues, and history layered and stacked as if in a child’s playhouse, positioned in front of the famed jazz club Minton’s Playhouse, on 118th Street. Her art has graced the covers of books and journals, and been included in group exhibitions, most recently *The First Sweet Music* (2014), at the John and June Allcott Gallery at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Last year her solo show, *A Head that Rolls and Gathers Moss*, was on view at the Newhouse Center for Contemporary Arts in Staten Island. Her curatorial work includes exhibitions for the Romare Bearden Foundation, Nathan Cummings Foundation, and Jazz at Lincoln Center (2009–12).

Harris-Kelley, born in New York in 1962, has been involved in the arts for over three decades. She is one of the leaders of the Romare Bearden Foundation, which supports the artist’s legacy. She authored “Revisiting Romare Bearden’s Art of Improvisation,” published in *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies* (2004). She earned a BA in art from California State University, and a MFA from the University of Michigan; and has taught art at New York University, the Parsons School of Design Studio Program, and Barnard College and Columbia University (a current seminar course on Bearden).

Marilyn Nance
The Marilyn Nance Archive contains not only photographs, cultural software, and ephemera, but also some sculptural pieces. Here I present to you this piece of cultural anthropology: My First Afro Pick. Purchased from an African-American artisan (name unknown) in Mount Morris Park in Harlem in 1968 (before it became Marcus Garvey Park, and way before gentrification), this artifact has been in the possession of the artist Marilyn Nance for fifty years.

Wagner’s photography explores and chronicles the poetic and lyrical nuances of daily life and everyday people, with city streets, public transportation, and twenty-first-century youth as his visual language. His work and sensibilities derive from his life experiences, which he firmly believes are the foundation to his mind’s eye, the starting point of his vision.

Wagner avoids an overtly documentary approach, but is committed to a kind of rigorous photographic surface. He has a passion for visual literacy and photo sequencing, and values the power images have to inform and enrich one another. Individually, each photograph is a moment in time, but together as a collection they form a narrative guided not by linear time but by emotion.

Wagner remains rooted in photographic film, including developing black-and-white negatives and making gelatin silver prints in his darkroom.

Gordon Parks
Gordon Parks was one of the seminal figures of twentieth-century photography. A humanitarian with a deep commitment to social justice, he left behind a body of work that documents many of the most important aspects of American culture from the early 1940s through his death in 2006, with a focus on race relations, poverty, civil rights, and urban life. In addition, Parks was also a celebrated composer, author, and filmmaker who interacted with many of the most prominent people of his era, from politicians and artists to celebrities and athletes.

Born into poverty and segregation in Kansas in 1912, Parks was drawn to photography as a young man when he saw images of migrant workers published in a magazine. He taught himself how to use a camera he bought at a pawnshop. Despite his lack of professional training, he found employment with the Farm Security Administration (FSA), which was then chronicling the nation’s social conditions. When the FSA closed in 1943, Parks became a freelance photographer, and balanced work for fashion magazines with a passion for documenting humanitarian issues. Parks worked at *LIFE* magazine for two decades, chronicling subjects related to racism and poverty, as well as taking memorable pictures of celebrities and politicians (including Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., and Stokely Carmichael).

Parks spent much of the last three decades of his life expanding his style. He continued working up until his passing, and won numerous awards, including the National Medal of Arts in 1988, and more than fifty honorary doctorates. The core of his accomplishments remains his photography—the scope, quality, and enduring national significance of which is reflected throughout the collection at The Gordon Parks Foundation.
Citi. Proud Partner of *Harlem Postcards*. Proud Sponsor of Progress.

Photo Studio
by Charmaine Marie Branch

Betty Blayton-Taylor
*Untitled*, 1974
The Studio Museum in Harlem;
gift of anonymous donor 1975.3
Courtesy the estate of Betty Blayton-Taylor
The Studio Museum came into being through the efforts of artist Betty Blayton-Taylor, who took on many roles as an arts educator and community organizer in Harlem. Blayton-Taylor moved to New York in 1960 after graduating from Syracuse University with a degree in fine arts, and briefly teaching in Saint Thomas. In Harlem, she began taking art classes with the Art Students League with painter Charles Alston. She focused on painting and printmaking, and created compositions such as *Untitled* (1974), in which abstraction provides space for the viewer to insert oneself into the self-reflective and meditative aspects central to Blayton-Taylor’s practice. An excerpt from her artist statement reads:

> I am deeply interested in metaphysical principles, all aspects of religion, mythology and the science of mind. The act of creating, as in painting and print-making, allows the exploration of techniques for the creation of mood and mind set changes much as in sound and music.

Not long after her move to New York, Blayton-Taylor became part of the Association Community Team of Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, a program that provided classes in art and other skills to teenagers. Blayton-Taylor encouraged her students to travel to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) to further their art education, but upon arrival they were not allowed inside the institution. She reached out to her contacts at MoMA to make sure the students weren’t turned away again, and also began conversations with Frank Donnelly, a member of the MoMA Junior Council, about the potential of creating a museum for her students in their own community.¹

Thus began the initial stages of the Studio Museum. Blayton-Taylor went on to serve as the secretary of the Museum Board from 1965 to 1977. Her voice and insight remain present in the curatorial and educational programming at the Museum today.

Xaviera Simmons

Chains, a vintage photograph, locks of hair, a bandana, and a bearded figurine. These are a few of the objects present in Xaviera Simmons's *Index Three, Composition Four* (2012). As a whole, the image can be read as a person raising their skirt to reveal a collection of objects underneath. Some of the objects seem arbitrary, while others could hold cultural or personal significance for the suggested person. There are no visible physical attributes to make assumptions about their character, and the figure is abstracted by the two-dimensionality of the photograph.

*Index Three, Composition Four* interrogates the relationship between one's persona and the objects collected or connected with throughout a lifetime. Simmons has created multiple compositions of figures in similar positions, but with different compilations of objects alluding to unknown but relatable subjects. Each person is an individual made up of multiple parts, influenced by cultures, histories, consumerism, and more.

The Studio Museum in Harlem has two photographs by Simmons in the permanent collection, the other being *Landscape: Two Women* (2005). They were both acquired at the end of her residency, which took place in 2011 and 2012, alongside Njideka Akunyili Crosby and Meleko Mokgosi. Over the years, the Museum has made an effort to obtain works by participants in the *Artist-in-Residence* program, and form a collection with a strong institutional history. The program is fundamental to the history of the Studio Museum. Cofounder Betty Blayton-Taylor described the initial concept of the Museum, in part, as a place that provides studio space for artists that was lacking in Harlem during the 1960s. *Index Three, Composition Four* is a testament not only to Simmons's multifaceted artistic practice, but also to the program's continuing support of emerging artists.

Photo Studio was made possible through funding by the Institute of Museum and Library Services
Elsewhere
March 31–July 22, 2018
Museum of Modern Art
New York, NY
moma.org

Adrian Piper: A Synthesis of Intuitions, 1965–2016 is a four-year collaboration between the Museum of Modern Art, the Hammer Museum, and the artist. The exhibition is a retrospective comprised of more than 290 drawings, paintings, photographs, videos, multimedia installations, and performances. Covering a wide range of Piper's artwork, the exhibition will explore themes that she has focused on throughout her career, including gender, race, xenophobia, social engagement, and self-transcendence. Piper's provocative conceptual works have a range of inspirations, from the use of LSD to Piper tapping into her male alter ego.

Above: Adrian Piper
Catalysis III, 1970

Opposite: Adrian Piper
Self-Portrait Exaggerating My Negroid Features, 1981
The Eileen Harris Norton Collection. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin
Derrick Adams: Sanctuary

January 25–August 12, 2018
Museum of Arts and Design
New York, NY
madmuseum.org

Derrick Adams: Sanctuary was inspired by The Negro Motorist Green Book, a travel guide for black road-trippers published from 1936 to 1967. Consisting of fifty mixed-media collages, the immersive installation reimagines safe destinations for black travelers during the era of Jim Crow laws. Adams encountered the guides at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture while preparing his show Patrick Kelly, The Journey, organized by the Studio Museum. The travel guides serve as a modern reminder of the black American struggle for equality, yet evoke the image of a mid-century black America at leisure. Questions of mobility, leisure, and access surface throughout the exhibition.

Derrick Adams
Beacon 2, 2018
Courtesy the Museum of Arts and Design
Photo: Jenna Bascom
Rodney McMillian: Against a Civic Death
February 1–August 26, 2018
The Contemporary Austin
Austin, TX
thecontemporaryaustin.org

Just a few blocks away from the Texas State Capitol, Rodney McMillian: Against a Civic Death explores symbols of power in the United States through the recreation of neoclassical architecture. Using buildings such as the White House to stand in as physical representations of racial power systems in the United States, McMillian has bifurcated the space, with one floor painted black and another in white. The immersive installation is composed of myth, memory, and storytelling, while investigating histories, injustices, and abuse of power in the United States.
Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture, 1963–2016 is the first exhibition of the artist’s sculpture at the Baltimore Museum of Art. The exhibition will include forty works—including his “Black Monolith” series—made of a variety of materials, including wood, marble, copper, bone, and personal mementos. The exhibition also includes sculptures and objects that inspired Whitten over the years, including figures from Cote d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. (The artist chose to make the vast majority of his sculpture privately in Greece.) Odyssey is co-organized with The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Jack Whitten
Tomb of Socrates, 2009
Courtesy the artist’s estate and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Genevieve Hanson
Jason Moran
April 26–August 26, 2018
Walker Art Center
Minneapolis, MN
walkerart.org

Jason Moran at the Walker Art Center is the artist’s first museum show. With a practice grounded in musical composition, Moran merges visual art with performance art, objects, and sound. Guided by the “set,” a jazz term for moments when musicians gather to improvise and create, the exhibition will present mixed-media installations of storied jazz venues of eras past. In addition to these installations, the exhibition will feature a selection of Moran’s charcoal drawings and projected media works created in collaboration with artists including Lorna Simpson, Glenn Ligon, Joan Jonas, and Stan Douglas.
Charles White: A Retrospective
June 8–September 3, 2018
Art Institute of Chicago
Chicago, IL
artic.edu

Charles White’s powerful interpretations of black history, culture, and life will be presented through a selection of more than a hundred of his paintings, drawings, and prints at the Art Institute of Chicago. White was a prominent artist during Chicago’s Black Renaissance of the 1930s and 1940s, and was a master draftsman. After living and spending time in New York and Mexico City, White eventually moved to Southern California and fully embraced drawing and printmaking. The exhibition will reopen an exploration of the themes he pursued in his work, including what White referred to as “images of dignity.”
Amy Sherald, the artist who recently made the official portrait of Michelle Obama, has a show that will feature portrait paintings of African Americans whom the artist encounters throughout her day. Her subjects are painted in gray scale and set against color-field backdrops, and are often adorned with modern yet nostalgic props and costumes. Sherald sees her art making as capturing depictions free from the restrictions of our dominant historical narratives.

Amy Sherald
*Varsity Girl*, 2016
Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago
Film Forum
Black Activism: Remember This House
by Malaika Langa

Black activism has been and remains fundamental to African-American survival and identity, from Jubilee to Jim Crow, from the civil rights movement to mandatory minimums and mass incarceration. In these five films, viewers see the iterative oppression and constitutional impediments that have, throughout history, been the official and civilian response to black liberation. The work of black activists is a common theme in these films, as the central narrative or in their very making.

I Am Not Your Negro (2016)
Director: Raoul Peck
Remember This House, James Baldwin's unfinished manuscript about the lives and assassinations of Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X, is the primary source material from which Raoul Peck creates this monument to the writer and political activist. Using Baldwin's own words, paired with archival footage and excerpts from American cinema, I Am Not Your Negro contextualizes America's tumultuous history of race relations as a corrosive force on the soul and future of the country.

13th (2016)
Director: Ava DuVernay
The Thirteenth Amendment, from which this film takes its name, abolished slavery and involuntary servitude except as punishment for a crime, thereby creating the prison-industrial complex through the mass incarceration of African Americans. From “convict leasing” at the end of the Civil War, to the war on drugs, black bodies have been commodified to support corporations and rural communities alike, creating generational disruption and widespread disenfranchisement.
Director: John Ridley
In 2018, *Let It Fall* seems like a prologue to the future. In Los Angeles, the period between 1982 and 1992 culminated in Rodney King’s beating by the LAPD, and a series of events that led to an uprising and a city on fire. The societal unraveling and civil unrest that Angelenos faced, had, at its foundation, a police state directed at the black population as part of the War on Drugs. Complicated cultural interactions and inequality all come into play, and this documentary shows that societal breakdown is years in the making.

The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson (2017)
Director: David France
In 1992 makeshift memorials appeared scattered along the sidewalks near the piers on New York City’s Hudson River. They honored Marsha P. Johnson, the African-American transgender activist, who was pivotal in launching the movement for transgender rights. Along with activist Sylvia Rivera, Johnson founded Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries to combat violence and advocate for transgender and queer rights, and she was a founding member of the Gay Liberation Front.

Director: Laurens Grant
Trayvon Martin in Florida, Eric Garner in New York, Michael Brown in Ferguson, Philando Castile in Minnesota. The murders of these unarmed black men fit an established and consistently repeating pattern in American history of police and mob brutality. These incidents served as the impetus for the founding of #BlackLivesMatter. Two of the cofounders of the movement, Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors, consider how to establish its narrative and the use of social media as a tool for creating awareness and realizing justice.
Maker’s Mixtape
“Joyride” with Sable Elyse Smith

by Nico Wheadon

Maker’s Mixtape celebrates artists whose practices animate processes foundational to the mixtape format—compilation, splicing, collage, looping, and overlay. By remixing diverse source materials and juxtaposing voices to establish complex narratives, both recording and visual artists have transformed popular understandings of what it means to be a maker in the twenty-first century. Inviting visual artists to share the songs that motivate them to create, Maker’s Mixtape draws meaningful connections between inspiration and process.

With musical inspiration spanning the vast cultural terrain between trap and art rock, interdisciplinary artist, writer, and educator Sable Elyse Smith bends genres even in her sleep. An undoer of language and seeker of truth, Smith unearths memories and traumas to produce works that are equal parts bold and quiet, personal and universal. It comes as no surprise that her top ten songs would—like her artwork—aim right for the deepest parts of you, infusing your day with both meditation and exclamation.

Her visceral collages, videos, and text-based works deploy repetition and fragmentation to dissolve understood boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, the real and the imagined. In her own words, Smith’s practice explores “the intersection of cinema, language—particularly the written text—and image-making: construction, deconstruction, and abstraction.” To imagine the poetic intersections of these distinct modes of making is to turn up the gritty soundtrack to a joyride with Sable Elyse Smith.
I’m listening to music all day—in the shower, when I’m commuting, when I’m joyriding, thinking about making work, and when I’m in the studio actually getting to it. Constant stimuli. You know me, I dance around all the time!

—Sable Elyse Smith
Book Review

Black Performance on the Outskirts of the Left: A History of the Impossible

by Malik Gaines

by Nelson George
Malik Gaines, an assistant professor of performing arts at New York University, attempts a very compelling high-wire act with this ambitious book, which leaps between a disparate group of black artists around the globe who pushed the envelope in using race, sex, and political change as inspirations for their art in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Trying to fit pianist/singer Nina Simone, Ghanaian playwrights Efua T. Sutherland and Christina Ama Ata Aidoo, German actor Günther Kaufmann, and Bay Area singer (not yet disco diva) Sylvester under one broad umbrella is a difficult task, especially because Gaines wants to slide iconic expats such as Josephine Baker and W.E.B. DuBois under it as well. “Decentered performances of racial and sexual difference suggest radical political outcomes,” Gaines writes, “but these potential outcomes are complicated by the expressive power of imagination, which in itself exceeds the rational containment of the body into legible, manageable, individual subject status. While such status had been conventionally denied to the marginalized, these performances of the sixties launch what would later be understood as a deconstructive critique of the center around which margins have been oriented.”

In reading Gaines’s deeply researched work, I’m not sure if he truly connected all the dots between the performers he’s chosen, but that in no way made the journey of Black Performance any less engaging. While Simone’s life and work has been the subject of a lot of attention the last few years due to a gritty documentary and a terrible feature film, the lesser-known artists Gaines focuses on are all fascinating. Sutherland and Aidoo are female playwrights at the dawn of Ghanaian independence who, spurred by the nation’s founding father Kwame Nkrumah, attempted to use theater to help forge a separate national identity at a time when the colonial legacy was still fresh, and the idea of reconnecting from African traditions had been hardwired into the population. The depictions of Sutherland’s Edufa, which recast a Greek myth into African reality, and Aidoo’s The Dilemma of a Ghost, in which an African man brings home an African-American wife, delve sensitively into the profound difficulties of merging divergent cultures in a highly charged political landscape. In using a Greek tragedy to communicate a Pan-African message, Sutherland used the master’s tools to attempt to build a new house, while Aidoo brought home the challenges of connecting the children of the diaspora (who were still seen as slaves by many Ghanaians) to the motherland.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder is a giant of postwar German cinema, a transgressive artist who mixed performance forms, working methods, and literary sources while building a troupe of performers he directed—and had sex with—in plays, television programs, and films. One of his key muses was the black Bavarian actor Kaufmann. They met working on a television show, and Kaufmann became a regular in Fassbinder’s prolific work. “Kaufmann serves a particularly visible site of the collapsing of race, class, gender, and sexuality into a radicalized character,” Gaines writes. “In a series of Fassbinder’s early films and television productions, Kaufmann consistently problematizes the representation of national identity with his German blackness, contributing bodily to those works’ ambivalence.” The discussion of Kaufmann’s many roles in Fassbinder’s work allows Gaines to mix film criticism, the history of performing arts styles, and German social history in some of the book’s best writing.

Sylvester is best known to most as the gay singer whose soaring vocals can be heard “You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)” and other disco classics. As such, he was a campy symbol of disco decadence. But Gaines looks into Sylvester’s earlier career, when he was part of a radical drag Bay Area performing arts collective called the Cockettes who, between 1969 and 1972, “activated an empowering countercultural visibility through constructed dress, speech, and physical action. These tactics allowed the group to radically restage the notion of sexual and gender identity in campy performances, and their life as performance approach made everyday practices into radical anti-normative spectacles.” For example, the Cockettes made a film called Tricia’s Wedding in 1971 to ridicule the marriage of President Richard Nixon’s daughter, which had been broadcast on national television. There’s a great still in the book of Sylvester in full makeup from this satirical film. The tension of Sylvester’s time with the Cockettes is that his vocal ability and stage savvy were often at odds with the group’s typically unstructured hippie ethos. As the black star of a white artistic community, Sylvester revealed the veiled racism just below the surface of the self-important, white, left-of-center group. If Black Performance on the Outskirts of the Left is not a totally coherent argument, it is a thoughtful, creatively designed look at complex and gifted artists at a crucial moment in history.
Give Us a Poem

this is what bodies do
by Chanice Hughes-Greenberg

bend under weight
carry as well
fold into another
& another

a limb here fits into the space yours creates
the light invited in
kept close

how many miles of organs do we contain
how to measure breaths taken
a mouth’s capacity

scars stitches body hair
a fingerprint a tongue
apply pressure

deliver a palm reading
an elbow a kneecap
a memory of fracture

sometimes a vessel
a warning
tender when touched

held
praised
bathed
left
then collected contained
offered obeyed

stretched toward the light
towards the morning through the binds

in another life a constellation
in another no history of pain
a body at rest
Give Us a Poem

Texas Isaiah
My Name Is My Name I, 2016
Courtesy the artist
Extra Virgin
by Desiree C. Bailey

Look once: and it’s her fingers that pull you in
the absence of them, how they’ve disappeared
within her, splitting her body like reeds
at the river’s lips. Bantu Knotted American
Queen, pedestaled at the top of the canvas.
Spill of red paint, blue drip of stars
pooling the foot of the nation.

Look again: not a clit
but a book that occupies the hand
and you smile at how easy it is
to mistake one pleasure for another
membrane for membrane
twin yearnings for the flesh-slit of knowledge
for after all, to know (in the biblical sense)
is to let the sweet waters run
down down the slope,
the purple mountains.

Stare until the painting becomes a mirror
until you are sixteen again in your room
with Jimi Hendrix plastered on the wall
like a saint. You are clutching a book
blotting the ink with your sweaty palms
hoving the words into your mouth
practicing, repeating, drilling an American accent
sloughing the saltwater off your tongue
speaking yourself into disappearance.

And you would have disappeared
were it not for the pussy’s pages
how turning them lit the tunnel into
yourself, to the books that could only be read
in salt and seaweed, and the touch that made you
crave your own dark scent. What tiny stars you
are, spilling.
Houston Conwill’s *The Open Secret* (1986) on the 4, 5, 6 line was the first public art piece commissioned by Arts for Transit, an initiative that came out of the Metropolitan Transit Authority’s massive overhaul of the subway system that began in 1985. Artists such as Conwill were asked to create work that would live in the hundreds of subway stations throughout New York.

Like the seven time capsules that Conwill buried at The Studio Museum in Harlem in 1984, which carry confidential notes from Romare Bearden, Toni Morrison, and other black cultural greats, the time capsules embedded in *The Open Secret* memorialize Harlem and speak to Conwill’s career-long interest in encapsulating, representing, and activating black American history.

As Betye Saar wrote in the brochure for a 1976 exhibition by Conwill called *JuJu*, Conwill’s works contain “information transmitted thru hieroglyphics and symbols (guardians, comings and goings, defeat or victory, life and death), and of a history of a people embedded, recorded, and suspended.” Similarly, *The Open Secret* bears news of the shared cultural practices that underlie life in Harlem, and transmits it to subway commuters through colorful shapes, patterns, etchings, and raised surfaces. It transforms the mundane space of the subway platform into a space for reflecting on the symbolism of pilgrimage.

Many people are familiar with Buddhist mandalas, a common kind of cosmogram, but there are many other instances of people using diagrams, geometric forms, and text to represent the universe. *Rivers*, a commission for the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, is an elaborate cosmogram created by Conwill in 1992 and dedicated to Langston Hughes and Arturo Schomburg. Implanted in the floor, the piece contains an urn full of Hughes’s ashes and features lines from his poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.” A famous photo of Maya Angelou and Amiri Baraka dancing on top of *Rivers* at a 1991 memorial program for Hughes illustrates how important human contact and contribution are to Conwill’s works, which often straddle the distance between installation, spirituality, and performance art.
During *Cake Walk*, filmed and performed in 1983, Conwill and five other dancers performed atop a colorful cosmogram that he had painted on the floor of the Just Above Midtown gallery. The performers’ movements recalled and were inspired by the cakewalk, a dance that originated in the mid-nineteenth century, when black American slaves entertained their masters by dancing competitively with other slaves to win cakes. Mounted to the walls surrounding the dancers were a series of triangular bronze reliefs with time capsules embedded in their centers, much like the bronze reliefs of *The Open Secret*.

Like *Cake Walk*, *The Open Secret* transforms the nature of the interactions, movements, and activities that take place around the work. The cosmograms, time capsules, and vibrant symbolism endemic to Conwill’s work set the stage for a celebration of black arts and cultural history. Instead of dancers activating the work, Conwill’s public art piece at the 125th Street subway station is activated by the everyday commutes of New Yorkers. The title, *The Open Secret*, prompts us to think about an ongoing process that affects us all, hidden in plain sight: the making and memorializing of black culture.
What Are They Made of There?

by Nectar Knuckles

As Harlem is seen, Harlem is heard. Through them both, Harlem is felt.

The visual culture of Harlem has historically been complemented and influenced by the neighborhood’s sonic production. Intertwined with one another, the visual art and music of Harlem embrace the legacy of black culture in New York and the rhythm of black life. To be in Harlem is to experience a connectivity—to space, to sound, to history, to people—that is easy to sense, but can be difficult to capture. Harlem’s nuances of visual and sonic elements mark it as a city that allows African diasporic culture to exist fluidly.
A city’s levels of accessibility, the uniqueness of its experience, and its architecture often denote the production of urban space. More than a physical space, though, what makes a place pivotal is how its social space is produced. In On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture, Seth M. Low describes the social production of space as “the actual transformation of space—through peoples’ social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting—into scenes and actions that convey meaning.” Harlem, as a place that has a legacy of cultivating black culture in the United States, is a neighborhood with urban space that has been constructed in synchrony with its social space.

For how intricately complex and sensorial Harlem is, an unfixed medium can best capture its ever-changing formation. Film and video—in their ability to depict, alter, and enhance moments, while also sonically engaging them—represent mediums that manage to mirror the fluidity of blackness that the neighborhood embodies. Arthur Jafa’s 2016 video Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death is an exceptional example of film’s ability to do this. In seven and a half minutes, Jafa shows footage of black life in America that emphasizes the joy and mastery that is visible within and outside the black community, which is laden with assault, grief, and fear. A clip of Storyboard P dancing in a room, validating his exceptionalism, transitions to one of Walter Scott being murdered. We see Olympic medal holder Derek Redmond being assisted by his father during the 1992 Olympics—a rare moment of public love between two black men—and then Dajerria Becton being slammed, flung, and dragged onto the ground by a police officer after a pool party. There are clips of Martin Luther King Jr. in a convertible, IceJJfish’s rendition of “Drunk in Love,” and the sun showing “the proper scale with which to consider black Americans’ lives.”

Love Is The Message, The Message Is Death is able to capture the fluidity of blackness because it is a work of black cinema. Cinema, in order to be black, must complicate the stability of typical cinematic practices by altering them to reflect black stylings—just as music has done. It cannot be black simply because its characters, narratives, or makers are black. As Jafa mentions in his essay “Black Visual Intonation,” this happens when film or video mirrors qualities of black intonation. Black music has a tendency to “worry the note.” The concept, also called a “blue note” in jazz and blues, is in a pitch slightly different than it would normally be. Black cinema makes the same slight difference in how film is produced by incorporating these stylings.

This strain of black cinematic production is fairly new. Charles Burnett’s Killer of Sheep (1978), Haile Gerima’s Child of Resistance (1973), and other films that came out of the L.A. Rebellion movement were the beginning of the practice, and there are certainly masterpieces of the form, but this cinema has not yet existed for as long black
music has—and therefore has not become as complicated. As a medium, black cinema is finding its footing through experimentation and play with other modes of visual culture. One of these modes is African-American social dance, due to its development in relation to black people’s “acute sensitivity to vectors [sic], or spatial arrays” that has been developed as an almost inevitable result of, yet also despite, societal structures. 2

The incorporation of space in these films is important because black people in America are deeply aware of how they occupy and alter space due to how black bodies have been objectified, othered, and attacked from the time of the transatlantic slave trade. As a result, black people’s social productions of space are heavily saturated with a history of confinement, surveillance, and migration. Thus, when Jafa is talking about black people’s sensitivity to space, we must consider that space isn’t ever neutral. It is always skewed to somebody’s favor. This somebody is rarely anyone black and thus the freedoms that come with existing in public are often lessened for those of the African diaspora. When black people are contributing to the social production of space, the tainted foundations of these structures must fundamentally shift. As with film, a black social production of space cannot simply be a place where the homeowners, business owners, and teachers are black. It must carry a black intonation that mimics the experience of those who live in it. This is something that we see in Harlem.

Harlem’s black intonation has existed since the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance. By the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance—a formative period of social, cultural, and artistic production within the black community—established the neighborhood as a site where black American cultural identity could flourish. It is where black people’s awareness of spatial arrays mixes with the black intonation of the development of the neighborhood. Thus Harlem is inherently intertwined with the literature, poetry, music, visual art, and performance produced by the people living there. It is an intersection of various modes of expressivity and because film is a result of a multitude of forms, it is the medium that most intrinsically visualizes the neighborhood as a distinct black intonation of space that allows black expressivity to flourish.

In redressing Harlem’s entwinement with music and visual art, Cecile Emeke’s film The Ancestors Came (2017) and Kahlil Joseph’s film Fly Paper (2017) address the neighborhood as a site that fosters change even as it is changing. Each video’s engagement with sound and framing of shots emphasize the way that Harlem exists as a site of visual aesthetics, enhanced by sounds that incorporate spatial vectors—and all of their influences—that exist in the black social production of space. 

The Ancestors Came displays how Harlem came to be this site by referencing its earlier years. The film cel-

Kahlil Joseph
Kahlil Joseph: Shadow Play (exhibition view), 2017
Courtesy New Museum, New York
Photo: Maris Hutchinson / EPW Studio
celebrates the life and work of Faith Ringgold and highlights the influence of the artist and writer’s childhood in Harlem. By having Ringgold herself discuss a past Harlem with imagery of present Harlem, Emeka establishes a distance between two times, but also gives the distance a positive connotation. One of the primary ways she does this is through sound.

Briefly going back to Love Is The Message, Jafa sets the video to Kanye West’s “Ultralight Beam,” which saturates it with isolation and space; the song mimics the reverence of the sublime—having a distance from the brilliance that surrounds you, while still being able to access that space of intimate connection. Similarly, the sound in The Ancestors Came creates a distance between past and present, but in order to allude to an intimate connection between them. This intimacy references all that has been created in Harlem, and the greats it has inspired, including Ringgold herself.

In two voiceovers in the film, the first scene is coupled with Ella Fitzgerald’s cover of Duke Ellington’s “It Don’t Mean A Thing (If It Ain’t Got that Swing)” and the second with Louis Armstrong’s “Mack the Knife.” Each of these songs creates a soft nostalgia, a thread of uplift and comfort, a wholesome and rich Harlem that is worth exploring.

Besides Ringgold, the subjects in the film are four children. Their exploration of the neighborhood, coupled with Ringgold’s almost wide-eyed accounts, gives Harlem an openness associated with possibility. Early on, there are fifteen seconds when all we see is a hand shaking a tambourine during a walk in a park. The shot changes, but the sound of the tambourine remains, and we see greenery in the park and then three children walking through it. They have a conversation:

Where is she from?
Brownsville, I think.
Is that what they’re made of?
Yep.
No, she says she’s from Harlem.
What are they made of there?
There is no response to this question. The tambourine intensifies before silence. The answer, though, can be found in Kahlil Joseph’s Fly Paper.

As The Ancestors Came focuses on the history of Harlem, Fly Paper is concerned with legacy. It is a film that prioritizes Harlem’s space by depicting what it is to be haunted by a place whose ghosts never really leave. Fly Paper takes cues—especially its dark chiaroscuro effect—from the photography of Roy DeCarava. DeCarava is the first black photographer to receive the Guggenheim Fellowship, in 1952, and is known for his photographs of Harlem and the rest of the New York jazz scene. Some of the photographs were used in the 1955 book, made in collaboration with Langston Hughes, The Sweet Flypaper of Life. Fly Paper follows entertainer Ben Vereen as he moves through Harlem—a film tinged with notions of death, loss, and memory.

Though the film is literally quite dark, it has a profound way of highlighting the interior of Harlem in a manner that is dislocated yet seamless. We see and hear all that we expect—crowded streets, an ambulance, Kevin Beasley’s Who’s Afraid to Listen to Red, Black and Green? (2016) in Morningside Park—but we also see what we may not be meant to. One scene is of Joseph’s late father, Keven Davis, on a gurney in a hospital. Regardless of what we should and should not see, we see it all. Coupled with this is the experience of hearing a Funktion-One sound system, which helps make the experience somewhat overwhelming. The sounds in Fly Paper are extremely heavy and intense, and were made in a collaboration between Kelsey Lu, Flying Lotus & HEALTH, James Williams Blades, and Parallax. This weight shifts between being amplified by moments, such as the echoes of steps or muffled conversations, and being lifted by direct and intimate phone calls or quiet moments. It is sometimes quiet, but never truly silent.

The mastery in Fly Paper lies in that it does not try to master anything except filmmaking. There is no strong control over Harlem, over the people walking in the street, over Storyboard P, Lauryn Hill, or Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts. What Joseph does is let the neighborhood speak for itself. The way he blends film and digital footage, the personal and the staged, simply fosters a dialogue between all of these components. Because there is so much of this footage—the video is twenty-three minutes long—there are many conversations to be had, but not all of them can be finished.

Perhaps the most resounding reason that film captures Harlem so well can be seen in Joseph’s play with splicing and transitions to defy the rigid linearity of time, space, and connections between people. In Fly Paper, everything feels as though it is happening at once—a moment that never ends.

The ceaselessness that Joseph captures in Fly Paper encapsulates not only black intonation, but also Harlem as a space of social production. This ceaselessness is what Harlem is. It is also, hopefully, what will allow the neighborhood to maintain its essence, as a site where black people and their culture can be nuanced and open.

The I, Too Arts Collective opened the doors of Langston Hughes’s Harlem home as a nonprofit in 2016. The young organization is developing programming that reflects their mission to support underrepresented voices in the creative arts while drawing upon Hughes’s literary and artistic praxes. Author and director of the collective Renee Watson had long seen the potential for Hughes’s former home to become an enriching public space. The brownstone had become a historical landmark in 1981, but remained empty for a number of years before eventually being purchased as a private home.
When the opportunity arose to lease the house, Watson began a successful crowdfunding campaign to raise the money required. On my first visit to the brownstone, program director Kendolyn Walker walked me through its rooms. We discussed the projects the collective is pursuing as well as their ongoing investigations into Hughes’s relationship with Harlem. Walker believes Hughes was being very deliberate in buying a home in central Harlem at 20 East 127th Street, between the Fifth and Madison Avenues. The brownstone allowed him to be involved in the everyday goings-on of the neighborhood. In his autobiography *The Big Sea*, Hughes describes arriving in Harlem for the first time to study at Columbia University in 1921:

… I can never put on paper the thrill of that underground ride to Harlem... At every station I kept watching for the sign: 135TH STREET. When I saw it, I held my breath. I came out onto the platform with two heavy bags and looked around. It was still early morning and people were going to work. Hundreds of colored people!
I wanted to shake hands with them, speak to them...
I went up the steps and out into the bright September sunlight. Harlem!

Before settling down he traveled and lived in cities around the world, but returned to Harlem at multiple points throughout his life. The Broadway success of the 1947 opera-musical *Street Scene*, for which Hughes wrote the lyrics, provided him with the funds to buy the brownstone where he lived with his aunt and uncle.

The Langston Hughes House provides an enriching context for collaboration and dialogue among visitors, supported by its history. Hughes conducted most of his writing on the third floor of the house, which is being renovated into studio space and living quarters for an artist residency program. The artists will reside there and host public workshops based on their craft. The collective also plans to renovate the garden surrounding the house, where Hughes used to work with young people from the neighborhood. A photograph of Hughes crouched in the garden surrounded by children hangs in the living room.

The original piano where Hughes and his aunt Toy Harper composed music together still stands in the parlor, and his typewriter sits on the mantel. The parlor provides the main programming space for the collective. They hold community hours and poetry salons, many of which feature emerging poets. There is a creative conversation series that acts as a forum for artists and writers, the Langston Hughes Creative Writing Institute for adults, and the Young Writers Institute for teenagers.
Ephemera from Langston Hughes’s life inside the Langston Hughes House.

Previous Pages:
The exterior of the Langston Hughes House, home to the I, Too Arts Collective.
The parlor inside the Langston Hughes House.
The collective is also working toward fostering community partnerships. In summer 2017, the collective took part in the inaugural Uptown Triennial with an installation by visual artist Beau McCall curated by Souleo.

In a city full of historical landmarks, Watson and her team have found a way to purposefully activate the Langston Hughes House. In an interview with National Public Radio, Watson discusses the thinking behind the collective’s programming:

“We’ve been talking a lot about what it means to embrace newness but also hold on to legacy, hold on to culture, and not erase the actual places that we believe are sacred spaces of the Harlem Renaissance.”

Hughes is lauded as an influential voice during the Harlem Renaissance. Many of his poems written in the 1920s illustrate the blues and jazz played at the Cotton Club and other iconic Harlem locations. The Harlem Renaissance is often referred to as a golden age of black art and culture. In many ways it has been fictionalized and romanticized, which draws attention away from the incredible impact of the everyday artistic collaboration and community engagement that took place during that time. Hughes worked in Harlem until his death in 1967, and now the works of the I, Too Arts Collective are a testament to the ongoing creativity of Harlem that exists beyond a mythologization of the past.

The collective’s name derives from Hughes’s poem “I, Too” first published in 1926 in the book The Weary Blues. It begins, “I, too, sing America,” and is written from the perspective of a black person facing racism and discrimination. The second half of “I, Too,” speaks of a tomorrow in which oppressors will be forced to recognize this person, and all black people, as citizens worthy of sitting at the table alongside them. “Harlem,” published in 1951 as part of the poem book Montage for a Dream Deferred, begins with the question, “What happens to a dream deferred?” The response is another question, “Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?” which inspired the title of Lorraine Hansberry’s 1959 play A Raisin in the Sun. The play depicts the life of a black family living in Chicago and the obstacles they face attempting to improve their quality of life. The title’s origin links two black communities in different cities with the shared history of the Great Migration. This relationship speaks to Hughes’s ability to connect with black peoples’ personal and communal experiences across geography and time.

“Harlem” remains incredibly relevant today. The question introduced in the first line of the poem resonates with the unclear futures of young people known as “Dreamers”, who are waiting for the government to decide whether or not they will have a path to citizenship. Marginalized peoples’ ongoing fight to be fully acknowledged as citizens of the United States is present in “I, Too” and threaded throughout his poems, plays, and life’s work.

One of the most important takeaways from my conversation with Walker is her insight into Hughes’s ability to connect with Harlem through multiple avenues. His multidisciplinary projects expanded continuously, and Harlem remained a steady source of inspiration in his creative practice. It is in that spirit that the I, Too Arts Collective seeks to provide numerous forms of community engagement for people to explore their own relationships with both Hughes and Harlem.

Community hours at the Langston Hughes House are held on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 12 pm to 5 pm, and on Thursdays from 12 pm to 7 pm. For more information visit the I, Too Arts Collective website at http://www.itooarts.com/.

Kayode Ojo always has the camera in mind. Despite earning a BFA in photography at the School of Visual Arts in 2012, the artist had never exhibited a photograph before this year. Rather, he uses the camera as a frame for a private audience, in which he stages, builds, and ultimately rehearses a “final” sculptural arrangement by carefully balancing found objects atop one another. The resulting compositions, sculptures that literally hang in the balance, exude seduction and desire, and create moments that might never be performed in the same way again.
In line with The Studio Museum in Harlem’s commitment to new and emerging artistic voices, *Practice in Print* provides a space specifically for emerging artists to create new work. For the inaugural feature and first issue of *Studio* to launch during *inHarlem*, I asked Ojo to think about Harlem in the broadest sense. His use of flashy clothing, accessories, wigs, and utilitarian objects such as acrylic chairs and velvet sofas, made me think of the abundance of retail outlets one finds in Harlem. From fast-fashion chains such as H&M to smaller stores such as Fino and the many street vendors that dot 125th Street, Harlem’s eclectic style is continually shaped by the aspirations of its vibrant inhabitants. Turning style into cultural capital, Harlem designers like Dapper Dan, who irreverently use luxury fashion logos to create street couture, are now recognized through collaborations with fashion houses like Gucci, affirming the subversive influence of Harlem’s self-made glamour.

Ojo’s materials unequivocally reflect our society’s fixation on self-representation. By positioning items in various states of being—body chains that hang off a chair or a tassel dress that cascades down a tripod—he creates ephemeral scenes that imply the body’s presence and personal narrative. His materials, often coupled with his titles, create a picture of a life lived through possessions, of archetypes shaped by myriad social and cultural forces. In an untitled sculpture from 2013, Ojo includes Bud Light Platinum bottles, DKNY underwear that was bleached in a pool at Le Bain, and Yaki Pony synthetic hair. In another untitled work from the same year, a black faux fur coat leans against a wall with a pair of golden curtain rods as an armature. The rods stand on the ground, crossed, and jut into the coat’s shoulders to create an abstracted yet familiarly irreverent pose, filled with attitude, sex appeal, and nonchalance.

*Closed Audition* (2017) builds upon Ojo’s recent sculptural work, and marks the first time he has used the photograph itself. Created over the course of several weeks in his bedroom in the Lower East Side, the photographs conceptually expand upon Ojo’s practice and build on his physical process, in which he tries on the items he finds before incorporating them into his sculptures. Here the artist’s body becomes the support for faux fur coats; blue velvet, satin, and zebra-print dresses; sequined gowns; black wigs; and rhinestone jewelry. The arresting images convey a precarious glamour, and like his sculptures, they bring attention to the accessibility of luxury and the way consumer culture affects notions of status, beauty, and sexual desire.

Ojo looked to Carl Van Vechten, the well-known writer and chronicler of the Harlem Renaissance, when making this work. Van Vechten’s intimate, luxurious color photographs of Harlem’s creative class, taken in front of vibrant backdrops in his apartment on West 55th Street, document the thriving cultural and intellectual life of black America at the time. Like Ojo, Van Vechten was an “outsider” to this neighborhood. A white Dutch-American from Iowa, Van Vechten’s fascination with the Harlem Renaissance eventually placed him squarely within its creative circles, for which he garnered more attention through his controversially titled 1926 book, *Nigger Heaven*.1

Luminaries such as James Baldwin, Billie Holiday, Langston Hughes, and the lesser-known singer and actress Joyce Bryant all sat for Van Vechten. His portrait of Bryant, who stands in front of a gold backdrop, embodies the particular kind of glamour, seduction, and spontaneity reflected throughout Ojo’s *Closed Audition*. Bryant looks toward the camera over her bare shoulder. Her gown, designed by legendary Harlem designer Zelda Wynn Valdes, glitters with a luminescence that’s reflected in her iconic hairstyle, which she colored with silver radiator paint.2 The portrait stands as a testament to Bryant’s creative determination and artistic ingenuity, which she carefully crafted through a bold style and uniquely theatrical persona.
The intimate setting, evocative pose, and performative nature of this photograph brought Ojo to consider contemporary fashion photography that utilizes lowbrow styling and mundane settings to create a “raw visual style” emphasizing intimacy and sexual desire. Ojo used an automatic Yashica T4, the “It” camera of the 90s and 00s. The results are highly personal and direct, and simultaneously evoke the grittiness of Juergen Teller’s photo shoots and the anonymous photos that might be found at a garage sale. We are left wondering what has happened to the artist in each scene as he contorts his body for the camera. Embodying what Tirdad Zolghadr refers to in his essay “The Future Has a Silver Lining” as the “counter-glamour of drag,” Ojo courts glamour in each photograph, considering its aesthetics and those who have access to it, through a performance that subverts gender and desire.

Closed Audition also calls to mind the infamous centerfold portfolio that Cindy Sherman made for Artforum in 1981, which features the artist emulating the visual language of photo spreads in pornographic magazines. Controversial yet fundamentally different than fashion photographers and adult image-makers in her position of critique, Sherman lends an important understanding to Ojo’s new work: To critique the system from within is a dangerous yet powerful act. Ojo reminds us of the visual frameworks that influence our desires and perceptions of self. His work lies in the way we perform, the objects we use, and the images we seek to portray—a practice that continues to push boundaries.


Following Pages:
Closed Audition: Boohoo Plus Verity Slinky Plunge Split Maxi Dress, 2018
Closed Audition: Yvonne Force Zebra Playa Caftan, 2018
Closed Audition: ASOS Snow Leopard Fur Coat – Cream, 2018
Closed Audition: CR Women’s Navy Cowl Neck Velvet Open Back Cami Midi Bodycon Dress (Floor), 2018
Closed Audition: CR Women’s Navy Cowl Neck Velvet Open Back Cami Midi Bodycon Dress (Upright), 2018
Closed Audition: Boohoo Plus Bethany Off The Shoulder Slinky Maxi Dress, 2018
All courtesy the artist
New Folk

by Sasha Jelan

Throughout history, art has been an innate expression of human creativity and communication. Through the ruins and artifacts of civilizations across the globe—from the craftsmanship of tribal divination tools, to the intricate needlework of quilts made by enslaved Africans mapping escape routes—art has been a way to assert culture and record the human experience. The influence of colonial powers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries contributed to the idea of art as exclusive, a commodity, created by acquired skill, only recognized and valued through the approval of an institution. As a result, generations of American artists were marginalized, unable to join academia and, therefore, unable to profit from the network of an institution.
While some African-American artists—notably writers James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, and Richard Wright—became successful by journeying abroad, where racial tensions were lower, many others, such as Sister Gertrude Morgan and James VanDerZee, went unrecognized until the end of their careers, or their lives.

Through various efforts, such as the civil rights movement, the act of integration, affirmative action, and financial aid, black and brown artists today have been afforded the opportunity to pursue the arts academically. They also have increased chances at institutional success through following the traditional route of earning a degree, gaining gallery representation, showing in museums, and developing a steady collector base. While this formula is promising, mixed-media artist Kyle Castro and photographer and installation artist Gogy Esparza are among a new generation who dare to redefine success and how it can be attained. These emerging artists are following in the footsteps of self-taught, outsider artists who have been making art for centuries. Not long ago, I sat down with them to learn more about how they navigate the art world.

Sasha Jelan: Tell me about your background. Where are you from and what kind of education did you have?

Kyle Castro: I’ve been creating my entire life. As long as I can remember. Nobody ever told me to do it, nobody ever really encouraged me. It’s something that I always did and I knew that it was something I liked. There is a website called Deviant Art and that’s what started me creating as much as I did when I was younger.
I would post things when I was only nine. People could follow you, it was like an early Instagram. I stayed online heavily from 2010 to 2013, and I remember in 2012 they released Instagram. I always used it to joke around.

Around 2015, I started to see this generation doing what they do and it inspired me and made me realize that independence in art is a thing. I can independently represent myself, as long as I know how to market myself. At that time, I was not going to graduate. I didn’t go to school when I was supposed to go. I would go to school and not go and it got to the point where I was able to graduate, but I just did not take that opportunity. I was thinking to myself, “What am I going to do with my life?” I just centered myself.

Gogy Esparza: I’m Ecuadorian, and my family immigrated from Ecuador in the 1980s. I was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, a big industrial town with a lot of factories and predominantly working-class. We all lived in a one-bedroom apartment in a housing project called Plumley Village. It was like twelve of us in that apartment—my aunts, uncles, and cousins.

I went to a diverse school. Everyone, for the most part, was in the same economic bracket and I think that bred an open mind. Growing up Ecuadorian, you don’t really feel American, so you adopt customs. Inevitably, I was product of 90s hip-hop. I was in the barbershop a whole lot, I would go there after school. The barbershop is like internet before the internet. You hear everything, music, sports, style—that was my upbringing. I first came to New York young, I’m talking five years old.

We were walking through Times Square and I told my mom, “I’m moving here.” That’s what made me want to get out early.

SJ: When did you realize you were an artist and that what you were doing is art?

KC: Around sixteen or seventeen. I began looking at things more as pieces, representing conceptual ideas.

GE: In the hood it’s like sports and music, but you don’t think you can be an artist. I didn’t even know that what was until I was nineteen or twenty. I was still thinking commercial.

SJ: How did you begin to learn a practice?

GE: I wanted to study fashion design. I got into Parsons, FIT, and Pratt but they didn’t give me any money so I went to NYU, where I got a large scholarship. I was downtown, and into the creative culture downtown. I met a photographer from the Bronx who photographed all the quintessential New York hip-hop culture, and I asked him if I could assist him and he let me. He said I should get a camera and mess around and that’s where it started.

I also worked for the photographer Mark Borthwick. His home was a sanctuary, he had a tepee in the middle of the room with incense burning. He had collages and would be cooking for you and reciting a poem. I’d never seen an artist. He was so tapped into his world and that changed me. I started taking photography seriously, taking photography and film courses for two semesters.

KC: Boredom. I slowly began to realize that there are no rules or constraints to what I can do. I can be an interior designer or a rapper. It wasn’t until I began looking into everything that I understood it’s all an art form. I understood versatility is the future. There’s no more one-trick ponies.

SJ: How were you introduced to or inspired by self-taught artists of previous generations?

KC: Sister Gertrude and few other artists inspire me. The first artist I learned about was Salvador Dalí. The reason I respect him and anybody who came after that period is that they were really challenging the idea of art. I’m interested in their journeys, how they came to be and how they rewrote the rules of art. They propelled things to where they are today. I think that period is so interesting as well because that’s when art really became a commodity, and it became an ego. It’s no longer just representing Christ and these ideas—you’re representing your own ideas, your own self, and the public wants a piece of you.

GE: I studied abroad in Madrid my junior year, I was nineteen and there I took a Surrealism course, art history, Dadaism, and our classes took us to museums like the Prado and the Reina Sofia, where we learned about Dalí, Velazquez, and Picasso. For me, Surrealism was like hip-hop and I identified with that. They were very rebellious against the institution of art that was in place. They changed things, and when I finally realized it I felt like I could do that, too. I would stand in front of these paintings for a long time and feel, “I know I can do this.”
SJ: How did you begin to collaborate with others?

GE: I saw kids getting busy and I was like “Yo, come have a show here!” When I opened up the gallery, it was very beautiful. People don’t know how hard this is. I took out a loan, cutting hair seven days a week, to be here. I made amazing friendships. I was having an open dialogue and sharing my space.

KC: I didn’t have a place to stay, so out of necessity I began to sell my work outside. Washington Square Park was the main spot I’d been hitting for those years that I was doing that. By staying in the street I met a lot of different people, and they came to me with opportunity.

SJ: How do you navigate an art world that still views you as “other”?

KC: My practice is the only place where there are no rules. That’s the only place I can really be myself. I put myself there and I’m free to do whatever I feel—it’s satisfying.

GE: The Spaniards colonized Ecuador and so you’re force-fed Catholicism when you’re young. As an Ecuadorian immigrant in this country, not only are you Catholic and always feeling guilty, but you are now a lesser-than, you are a worker. You’re a working-class minority with a stigma attached to you. Inherently, I felt docile. I felt like I couldn’t do anything, and my heroes were always black because I grew up in hip-hop and in the projects with these people, everybody at the shop is predominantly Latino and black. Where is the contemporary voice for this narrative? Kids don’t usually get to go to NYU on a full scholarship, especially from any ghetto or hood. I felt I had to take what I learned and introduce a different texture to this conversation. We need to have that dialogue and challenge the way we are perceived. America is not used to a certain narrative. I want to keep knocking down that door.

SJ: How do you determine value?

KC: It depends on the experience in my life that the piece pertains to. All of my work is a reflection of my life. If I feel like it is personal, I would never sell it. I’ve turned down people before because a piece is so personal to me, so valuable. I’m my own art collector.

SJ: What challenges have you faced as a result of your nontraditional routes?

GE: The hierarchy of art is preset, impenetrable. As a person of color, who is not being a token, you have to work extra hard. There is still a perception of what a Latin American artist looks like or what my work is supposed to be like.

KC: I feel like I missed out on my youth and allowing myself to let loose. I always put a strain on myself, since I was sixteen, about where I was going to be. I did meet a lot of different people through this and the common interest is always art. I’ve been able to talk to people I’m inspired by and respect highly—that is something I gained.
Hearing Harlem

by Nico Wheadon

With a vested interest in both artists and the sociocultural conditions that shape art, the Public Programs & Community Engagement Department is rearticulating its collective impact model to center art, community, and participation in equal measure. Looking ahead to The Studio Museum in Harlem’s fiftieth anniversary — and the construction of our new, purpose-built home on 125th Street — we have entered into a liberal and de-spatialized moment of self-reflection, anchored by a desire to listen and learn from our neighbors as we continue to grow.
We began this transition by reflecting on our journey as an institution. What is the Studio Museum without the physical structure that has supported our work for most of our history? How can a museum without walls deliver its mission and work beyond preexisting platforms and into a whole new realm of possibility? What does it mean to be an institution in flux, rooted in a place that is also undergoing a radical transformation? And how does a museum that is building capacity for its institutional growth remain responsive on personal and local levels?

In 2016, the Museum piloted inHarlem, a series of public art initiatives and collaborative programs that bring the Museum’s programs into the community and partner institutions in dynamic ways. Large-scale artist projects in historic Harlem parks and arts-driven programs in public libraries have served as grounds for innovation where, together with our partners, we aligned institutional missions, melded audiences, and emboldened artists to dream and work on scales previously unimaginable. Our desire to understand the impact of this expanded way of working served as the basis for a newly articulated community of practice at the Museum—the Community Advisory Network (CAN).

Established in 2017, CAN’s primary goals are to support open and transparent dialogue among neighbors, evaluate the depth and potential of the inHarlem program, and provide a structured platform for local voices to both inform and champion the Museum’s future work. An esteemed cohort of roughly twenty local artists, residents, cultural leaders, educators, parents, program alumni, and representatives from nonprofits and community-based organizations throughout the neighborhood, CAN has empowered the Museum to understand issues affecting Harlem more comprehensively.

In articulating the importance of this local focus, one advisor who works through local churches asserts, “It’s the community that drives the institution. You must continue to inject yourselves into the community ... it’s the community members and institutions that should be overwhelmingly supporting who you are, now and in your future.”

For the Studio Museum, community has always been at the heart of how we self-identify. The art, people, and ideas that have flourished within these walls radiate the vibrancy and history of our birthplace; they coalesce around a shared pride in all that has been “inspired and influenced by black culture.” Additionally, the Museum grows its family by incubating creative talent and professional development on all levels, from our growing line of Artist-in-Residence alumni, to the countless cohorts of interns, fellows, educators, and arts administrators that have gone on to impact and expand the field. Our community is ever-growing and ever-evolving.
Equally important, we have found community in our home of Harlem, which—in all its concrete realities and mythical projections—has remained the rich well from which the Museum draws. Despite our ongoing commitment to expanding the resources available to contemporary black art and its practitioners, it is clear that more needs to be done to meet new audiences where they are.

CAN’s quarterly meetings serve as a unique opportunity to listen, learn, and draw inspiration from individuals and organizations already conducting amazing work in our neighborhood. Each session is centered on a special topic or framework upon which to build group discussion, and begins with staff presentations that lay bare select material and conceptual processes. This transparency and trust are the basis upon which CAN’s communication is built, encouraging the candid exchange of challenges and best practices across fields, audiences, and silos of work. As such, this network—with the distinct experiences it brings together—is uniquely poised to enact systemic and institutional change that keeps pace with the transformations taking place around us every day. The cohort’s diverse expertise and commitment to making Harlem a powerful place to live and work help shape our approach as we continue to have conversations throughout the neighborhood.

Another advisor with a background in education stresses the importance of a shift in professional attention during this historical moment: “For those departments that have not taken a program’s approach, that’s essentially what they’re going to be doing during inHarlem. They’re not going to be able to do the work as it’s been done, through the internet, Museum space, foot traffic, or brand recognition. Everyone is going to have to create and communicate through relationships—we learn by listening!”

“Relationship Building” was the theme of our kick-off meeting last August. We opened with introductions and first-hand accounts of how we each see, experience, and understand our neighborhood. Many in the group have called Harlem home for their entire lives, and were proud to share fascinating stories from the radical decade in which this institution was founded. Celia Scott-Wickham—a founding member of CAN and cherished member of the Museum’s Arts & Minds program, who has sadly since passed—motivated the group to shed poetics in discussing Harlem’s past and future. A devout Harlem resident whose social justice work spanned institutions such as St. Mark’s United Methodist Church, Minisink Townhouse, the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, Community Planning Board 9, the Central Harlem Partnership, and multiple community empowerment organizations, Scott-Wickham’s life of public service and arts advocacy continues to serve as a beacon for our work.
In our second meeting, the breakout groups responded to the prompt, “How can the Museum reconsider its visibility—both on 125th Street and throughout the neighborhood—during this exciting and transformative moment?” One group discussed how to mobilize new audiences in the immediate areas surrounding the Museum’s satellite programming and site-specific exhibition spaces. Another group explored how new marketing strategies could help raise awareness among underserved audiences. The last group discussed ways to make the building construction processes transparent and legible for the public.

Supported by advisors representing more than twenty organizations and interest groups throughout Harlem, our department is confident in its growing ability to ensure local voices are reflected in all that we do. With more ears to the ground, we are able to support our neighbors in their work and learn from their triumphs and toils, while translating this knowledge to augment the numerous ways we support artists navigating this shared terrain.

At the midpoint of our first year together, it is clear that there is much work to be done in our neighborhood, on every level. With local issues ranging from gentrification and cultural displacement to illiteracy and ageism, the group has worked hard to acknowledge, give voice to, and share tools with those often overlooked in these conversations. As we step out more boldly in directions not yet traveled, Public Programs & Community Engagement values the community of people who may not yet know that the Museum exists just as much as the communities that do. The message resounds now more than ever—museums must be clear in how they define, engage, and serve their communities. And in continuing to support artists and their ideas to the best of our ability, we, too, must come to embody an active citizen, a neighbor and collaborator willing to work with, for, and through our community.

All photos: Henry Murphy
Walking in Harlem with the Second Grade

by Jennifer Harley
The Studio Museum in Harlem has a long history of school partnerships. These in-depth, multi-session programs are created in collaboration between the Museum, schools, and community organizations throughout the city. We work with educators of all disciplines, school administrators, parents, artists, and the surrounding community—each partnership is tailored to the specific needs of the school or community organization and designed to build creative experiences that connect art and artists of African descent to school curricula, community needs, and Harlem.

School partnerships offer young people the opportunity to engage with living artists in their classrooms and youth-focused organizations through work with teaching artists. By transforming classrooms into art studios, students learn about artists in our permanent collection and are empowered to think critically and creatively about the world around them as they create their own artwork. These relationships with the surrounding community have always been central to the mission of the Studio Museum and continue to grow and deepen through inHarlem.

Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School, located on 151st Street, is one of our longest-running school partners, as we have worked with teachers throughout the school for over nine years. This year, we are continuing our partnership with the school’s two first-grade and two second-grade classrooms. With the second-grade classrooms, we focused on one of their main units of study, “Community.” Every class at the school is named after a Harlem landmark that the students learn about throughout the year, so we were excited to kick off our partnership with a walking tour of Harlem, with site visits to their classroom namesakes, Marcus Garvey Park and the National Black Theatre.

Students in the second grade at Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School on a walking tour of Harlem, New York

All photos: Jennifer Harley
The Studio Museum in Harlem is the nexus for artists of African descent locally, nationally and internationally and for work that has been inspired and influenced by black culture. It is a site for the dynamic exchange of ideas about art and society.
The walking tour started at the Studio Museum with a conversation around the relationship between the words “Me, We” featured in Glenn Ligon’s installation, Give Us a Poem, in the Museum atrium. The students then left the Museum and walked east on 125th Street, past construction sites and the new Whole Foods on the corner of Malcolm X Boulevard, and then continued down 124th Street to Marcus Garvey Park. As the sun came out, students took a moment to reflect on community through drawing and poetry in the park’s Richard Rodgers Amphitheater. The walk continued to National Black Theatre, where we learned about the history of the theater and the block, and got to peek in on a rehearsal, before we headed back to the Studio Museum. It was exciting to see students exploring and discovering new things in Harlem, the neighborhood where they live and attend school every day.

Students are enthusiastic to continue their partnership this spring and to explore painting and photography as they create their own artwork inspired by Harlem. The classes will focus on artworks from the Studio Museum permanent collection by Lynette Yiadom-Boakye and Jordan Casteel. The students are looking forward to Casteel’s visit to their classes.

Across all of our inHarlem school partnerships we are excited to continue exploring public artworks, exhibitions at our inHarlem partner sites, art in our permanent collection, and Harlem as we continue to collaborate with schools and community organizations.

If you are interested in building a partnership with the Studio Museum, please email schools@studiomuseum.org.
DIY
Grow Your Own Crystals
by Chloe Hayward
Taking inspiration from art, work with an adult to grow your own crystals! Inspired by artist Michael Demps’s artwork *Untitled: Dehiscent Echo* (2017), use everyday household materials to create a colorful sparkling, sculpture!

**Materials**

- Pipe cleaner
- Borax
- String
- Pencil
- 7 cups of water
- Food coloring
- Aluminum foil
- Pot
- Large glass container/jar

**Steps**

**Step 1**
Fill a large pot with the water, and with the help of an adult, bring it to a gentle boil.

**Step 2**
Add borax by the cup and stir, continuing to add it until the water stays cloudy. Transfer the solution to a large glass jar or container.

**Step 3**
Add food coloring to the cloudy water to give your crystals color.

**Step 4**
Take your pipe cleaner and create a twisted coil. Attach the coil to your string and then tie the string to your pencil.

**Step 5**
Dip your pipe cleaner in the colored solution a few times before setting it down inside. Cover the solution with foil overnight. You will have crystals the next day!

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*Michael Demps
Untitled: Dehiscent Echo
(installation view), 2017
Courtesy the artist
Photo: Adam Reich*
It was a cold day last fall when I visited my friend Angelica Calderon on the campus of Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The last time Angelica and I had seen each other was during summer 2017, at the Expanding the Walls exhibition at The Studio Museum in Harlem. She was an Expanding the Walls intern for the summer semester of the program, as I was for the spring. I sat in on her photography class, for a day of conceptual critiques. The students placed their works on a white wall—Angelica’s were a series of self-portraits that include text. This meeting felt special because I was entering her space, where she produces personal works that I have learned are an ode to her late grandmother, Carmen.

While Angelica was a student in Expanding the Walls, she often used her family and community in the Bronx as subjects. Her classic statement was shooting in black and white. Our relationship has always been nothing but laughter and respect. I am happy and proud to see how far she has come.

Zainab Floyd: What is life like after Expanding the Walls?

Angelica Calderon: I am a sophomore now at Rutgers University. I am currently studying photography at Mason Gross School of Art, which has been transformative for me. I am working at a cultural center, where I help out with creative projects alongside supervisors. Looking back to when I was a junior in high school, I feel more confident because of the program and what I learned during my time at the Studio Museum.

ZF: How has your work changed since?

AC: My work has changed with the addition of color, in addition to black and white. I also use myself as the subject, something I was really insecure about back then. I’m starting to get into film photography, and I am trying to invest in a medium-format camera, hopefully. I feel more confident in my process after the advice and love I received from the Expanding the Walls family.

ZF: Why did you start using yourself as a subject?

AC: I started using myself as a subject earlier this year because I wanted to get to know myself, in order to produce better work. It is also personal growth, as I come to better understand my capabilities as both artist and subject. As a person of color, I deconstruct myself, especially in the context of what’s going on in the
world right now. I'm trying to figure out how my art can help social change, starting on campus.

ZF: What was your experience like as first an Expanding the Walls student and then as an intern?

AC: The class I worked with as an intern was the best. I was really happy to get back to the Studio Museum and I felt like I was in Expanding the Walls again. The teens were really passionate, and it was so fun to see how excited they were on the museum trips, how eloquently they spoke with artists. They were the smartest and dopest group I’ve ever met. They achieved so naturally and I’m happy I was there to witness it. Being with the program was a safe space for me. It made me happier, it helped me grow better.

ZF: Is this an ode to your grandmother [referring to her work on the wall]?

AC: I don’t know, I think all my works are an ode to my grandmother.

ZF: How important is identity in your work?

AC: What? Let me tell you something. With the current state of this country, and what’s coming in the next few years, I have to figure myself out. I have been trying to find a way to give that representation. It’s like the things I am noticing on campus, in terms of division.

ZF: Did you notice that before?

AC: I mean yeah ... there is like a white supremacist group on campus, and the more I hear stuff like that, the more crucial education is for me as an Afro-Latina.

ZF: Do you listen to music during your process?

AC: I have a playlist, I usually listen to Kendrick, Solange, and old hip-hop like Nas and Wu-Tang Clan.

ZF: Which artists inspire you?

AC: Kendrick Lamar, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, so many. I came home from college for Thanksgiving and paid a visit to Zainab Floyd’s house in Mount Vernon. It was my first time there, and I loved the scenery. Her house, like Zainab herself, is colorful and beautifully detailed. We were in her bedroom, laughing and discussing our time with Expanding the Walls: embarrassing and hilarious stories, crushes, the exhibition openings. We realized how much we had grown in just two years. We sighed ...

Angelica Calderon: How do you balance academics and art in college?

Zainab Floyd: This sounds sad, but I am terrible at managing my art and academics. The only time I create is when I am on the train. I have a two-hour ride from home to school. I try to utilize that time to write poems that I use in my work. The days that I have night classes I photograph based on my poems in the afternoon. I am majoring in art history so I spend most of my time analyzing, reading, and studying.

AC: Any piece of advice you would give to younger, Expanding the Walls self?

ZF: You and your work are always changing and that is okay, baby girl!

AC: Being in an internship and working alongside a new class, how has that shaped you?

ZF: Those students were what I looked forward to each week. They are extremely sharp and thoughtful, and extremely aware of themselves in ways that I had never considered at that age, when I was in the program. It was weird but exciting to hear their questions. It was an honor to work with them.

AC: Who are your inspirations?

ZF: Everything Carrie Mae Weems [laughs]. I have been collecting a lot of work done by other artists in other genres, such as dance. Currently Katherine Dunham is inspiring my work. Archival works by black female artists. I am currently looking at the organization Where We At: Black Women Artists. They inspire me immensely because they paved the way for me. Also, they are fabulous.

AC: Has Expanding the Walls influenced your work or personal growth?

ZF: The program has influenced my work—everything I do. That was the best time in my life. I did not even consider myself an artist. I did not believe in myself. When I became part of the family, I met individuals who were like me. Our educator also played such an important role for us as artists. Whenever I look back, I am grateful. I would not be who I am today, or have done what I have if it were not for Expanding the Walls and the Studio Museum family.

To see more of Calderon and Floyd’s photography, including a special portfolio produced during this interview, please visit Studio online at studiomuseum.org/studio-magazine

Angelica Calderon and Zainab Floyd spend a moment in front of the camera
Photo: Zainab Floyd
The Studio Museum in Harlem has had a momentous year. Looking towards our fiftieth anniversary, the Museum made incredible progress on its new building project and Capital Campaign. In September 2017, the design for the Museum’s new home was unveiled.

For five decades, the Museum has been a cultural anchor on 125th Street and is eager to better serve its many audiences and communities with ambitious and meaningful exhibitions in this state-of-the-art facility designed by Sir David Adjaye of Adjaye Associates and Cooper Robertson. The building will be 82,000 square feet with an iconic sculptural facade that speaks to the Museum’s work and invites visitors and passersby into the Museum from the bustling sidewalk of Harlem’s main thoroughfare. An integral aspect of the design is a signature, porous hall and lobby that will be free, welcoming, and open to the public. Space for exhibiting and creating artworks will more than double, allowing the Museum to share even more art from the permanent collection and temporary exhibitions year-round. Visitor, public, and educational spaces will increase by nearly 50 percent; and outdoor space will also double.

The Museum’s Capital Campaign goal of $175 million has been 70 percent realized. We are thrilled by the incredible enthusiasm we have received from our communities, including the City of New York, our lead partner. Groundbreaking for the new building is set to begin in fall 2018—we are eager to move this journey forward!
Profiles in Genius
Njideka Akunyili Crosby
and Dawoud Bey
by Elizabeth Gwinn
Artists Dawoud Bey and Njideka Akunyili Crosby are both 2017 recipients of the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship, or “genius grant,” awarded annually to talented individuals who have shown extraordinary originality and dedication in their creative or intellectual pursuits. In celebration of this honor, I asked them each about the Studio Museum, Harlem, and what the award means to them.

Elizabeth Gwinn: You both developed strong ties to the Studio Museum early in your careers. Dawoud, you were an exhibiting artist and Museum employee, and Nijdeka, you were an artist in residence. How has the Museum impacted your life and your work?

Dawoud Bey: The Studio Museum is the place where I first began to find my community—young black artists like myself and older black artists who became my first inspiration and mentors. I’ve had a close relationship with the Studio Museum since the early 1970s, when LeRoy Clarke and Valerie Maynard were in residence. I’ve gone on to form deep relationships over several decades with a number of artists in residence, including Willie Birch, David Hammons, Charles Burwell, Maren Hassinger, and Kerry James Marshall. I also met Mel Edwards, Jack Whitten, and other artists of the generation before mine. They became longtime friends and mentors as well.

In 1977, I was asked to teach a photography class at the Studio Museum. Carrie Mae Weems, now one of my closest friends and confidants, was a student in that class. It also provided my first affirmation and experience of teaching, which I have now been doing for several decades. My first solo exhibition, Harlem, USA, was held at the Studio Museum in 1979. That exhibition brought me my first critical notice and was the beginning of my life as an exhibiting artist—a very significant turning point for me, when my dreams and aspirations became reality. In the ensuing years, when I needed freelance work to sustain my practice, the Museum provided that as well. You can find my name in eight-point type in the photo credits in some of those early catalogues!

Quite simply put, I don’t know what kind of a career I would have had were it not for the Studio Museum. As the only place at the time where I could have exhibited my early work, it pretty much made my career possible by providing that initial platform.
Njideka Akunyili Crosby: I spent my first year after graduate school (2011–12) as an artist in residence at the Studio Museum. That experience was invaluable to the development of my art practice. The program gave me much-needed time and space to experiment. Studio visits by mentors, artists visiting the Museum, and fellow residents helped me figure out how to add nuance to my work. The support I received from the Museum and its extended family has been critical to my progress. For that whole year, I was able to work in the studio practically every day. This level of immersion is a luxury that is unheard of for most young artists and, much like a language immersion program, it accelerated my developing my artistic vocabulary.

It's hard to overstate how magical my time at the Studio Museum was. Within a few weeks of starting the residency, I felt completely welcomed. Every day, I walked into the Museum to a big smile and chatted with Tim at the entrance desk. Whenever I needed a break, I would pop down to the administrative offices. And the Museum space, with its incredible shows, was two floors below me when I needed an artistic stimulus. The support did not end after that year. My first two exhibitions in Los Angeles (at the Hammer Museum and Art+Practice) were organized by Jamillah James, who I got to know at the Studio Museum. A number of other shows came about because the curators had seen my work at my Artist-in-Residence show, and some of the other residencies I've done have been at the nomination of a Studio Museum curator.

The Studio Museum played a prominent role in my ability to envision being an artist. Early on, seeing works by contemporary artists of African descent—works depicting people of color by artists of color—exhibited at the Museum not only made me more ambitious in my goal but also opened up art institutions that previously I did not feel acknowledged by as a viewer or potential exhibiting artist. The older artists of the diaspora have set the pace—and cleared the path!—for artists of my generation. The Studio Museum has established a legacy of promoting work by artists of color, the momentum of which has propelled me and others, and will continue to do so into the future.

EG: Dawoud, you’ve said that you were first introduced to Harlem because of your family’s history in the neighborhood, but what keeps you coming back? Does your time in Harlem inform your other work?

DB: Harlem keeps me centered. Because it is the beginning of my own personal narrative, I return to it periodically as a way of remaining rooted. The neighborhood is no longer as it was when my mother and father lived here, but there is a place memory that lingers; I still remember and am inspired by its past. I believe that the deeper meaning of a place lies within the ways in which the present overlaps with the memory of the past—when I am in Harlem, I’m experiencing both. This is what brought me back in a more sustained way, recently, to make work that visualizes the intersection of a newly emerged present with a physically receding past, to use the visual poetics of photography to show how global capitalism is reshaping this community.

As the place where I first worked out my ideas about the relationship between place, history, narrative, and the black subject, and the medium of photography, Harlem always figures somehow and somewhere in my consciousness.

EG: Njideka, how did working in Harlem inspire you?

NAK: Since my work is often autobiographical, I frequently model parts of my interiors after my living spaces, so it follows that the architecture and light of Harlem found their way into my work. Also, at that time, my studio at the Museum was the largest I had ever worked in, which encouraged me to work at a larger scale that offered a more immersive viewing experience. One of the themes of my work is cosmopolitanism, and I truly felt it while living in Harlem. I think the biggest contribution Harlem made to my work isn’t something visible I can
point out in a work and name. Rather, my time there was very fruitful and, frankly, I attribute a lot of that productivity to the sense of happiness and well-being that I felt residing in Harlem. In all the places I have lived in the United States, Harlem is where I felt the most comfortable. I loved walking around such a multiethnic place and feeling like I belonged—I never felt like I stood out, because I was surrounded by people from everywhere.

It was also while living in Harlem that, inspired by the many stores carrying President Obama portrait fabrics, I began collecting portrait fabrics from my family members. These unique fabrics are common for celebrating special occasions in my home country of Nigeria; they are printed with patterns that feature headshots of honored individuals and are commissioned to commemorate weddings, burials, and political campaigns. Seeing them on the streets of Harlem gave me the idea to collage them into my paintings.

**EG:** The MacArthur “genius grant” is one of the most celebrated awards an artist can get. How does it feel to be recognized in this way, and what do you think its impact has been, or will be?

**DB:** Having been working for some four decades now, to me the MacArthur Fellowship feels like an important affirmation of my work. It has certainly made my already busy life even busier! It is certainly a very good feeling. Enough artist friends of mine had already received this recognition, so I had hoped they might find me eventually! But at the end of the day, all one can do as an artist, I believe, is to keep working, and to strive to make work of consequence that provokes and participates in a meaningful conversation, both with history and one’s own moment.

**NAK:** It still feels surreal. So many people who inspire me are MacArthur Fellows. I heard Bryan Stevenson, the founder of Equal Justice Initiative, speak recently and was in awe of him. Being a MacArthur Fellow alongside the likes of him makes me want to work harder, and push myself to make pieces that are even more critically engaging.

The monetary grant that comes with the fellowship will allow me to strike a healthier balance between research and production, which will hopefully improve my paintings. For example, I am about to start a piece that will go up in the Brixton train station in London. Brixton, like Harlem, is a cosmopolitan neighborhood. It is where the first wave of Caribbean immigrants to the United Kingdom settled. It also has a large African population. Thanks to the MacArthur grant, I can afford to take time off to travel to Brixton for a long research trip before I begin the piece. This alleviated pressure means that I can take more risks, experiment more, and have more room to fail. I think this flexibility will result in growth in my artistic practice.

This interview has been edited and condensed with the permission of the artists.

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*Opposite: Njideka Akunyili Crosby in her studio*  
*Courtesy John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation*

*Above: Dawoud Bey*  
*Courtesy John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation*
The Studio Museum in Harlem held its annual gala on October 30, 2017, with an evening of dinner and dancing among artists, patrons, and Museum friends. Director and Chief Curator Thelma Golden was delighted to acknowledge the visionary work of Sir David Adjaye OBE, renowned architect and principal of Adjaye Associates, and to have David share words on the importance of architecture and the visual arts. The evening featured the presentation of the Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize, which was awarded to Simone Leigh, the twelfth artist to receive this prestigious $50,000 cash award, thanks to the support of George Wein. Gala 2017 raised a record $2.4 million to directly support the Studio Museum’s inHarlem initiatives and signature Artist-in-Residence program.

The Studio Museum would like to express its heartfelt thanks to the supporters listed on the following pages.
On October 30, 2017, Simone Leigh was awarded the twelfth annual Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize at The Studio Museum in Harlem Gala. Established by jazz impresario, musician, and philanthropist George Wein, in memory of his wife Joyce, a dedicated Trustee of The Studio Museum in Harlem, the Wein Prize honors the legacy of a woman whose life embodied a commitment to the power and possibilities of art and culture. In keeping with Joyce’s support for living artists, the Joyce Alexander Wein Artist Prize recognizes and honors the artistic achievements of an African-American artist who demonstrates great innovation, promise, and creativity. Envisioned as an extension of the Studio Museum’s mission to support experimentation and excellence in contemporary art, the prize includes an unrestricted monetary award of $50,000.

Leigh’s practice is an ongoing exploration of black female subjectivity. She creates sculpture, video, and installation, all informed by her examination of contemporary ethnography, feminism, and performance. Her objects often employ materials and forms traditionally associated with African art; her performance-influenced installations create spaces where historical precedent and self-determination comingle. Through her investigations of visual overlaps between cultures, chronology, and geographies, she confronts and examines ideas of the female body, race, beauty, and community.

Leigh’s history with the Studio Museum spans nearly a decade, with her work first exhibited work in 30 Seconds off an Inch (2009). She was a participant in the Museum’s Artist-in-Residence program from 2010–11. Along with the program’s culminating exhibition, Evidence of Accumulation (2011), Leigh has exhibited work in The Bearden Project (2011), Radical...
In 2016, Leigh was selected to be part of the Museum's inaugural inHarlem programming. inHarlem: Simone Leigh was comprised of A particularly elaborate imba yokubikira, or kitchen house, stands locked up while its owners live in diaspora (2016)—three structures reminiscent of imba yokubikira (kitchen houses) from Shona-speaking rural areas of Zimbabwe, inserted into the landscape of Marcus Garvey Park. Her work has also been shown nationally and internationally at institutions including the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas; Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St. Louis; Tate Exchange, Tate Modern, London; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and New Museum, New York.

Simone Leigh received an Anonymous Was a Woman Award in 2016 and a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in 2016. She is also the recipient of the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Biennial Award (2013) and the LMCC Michael Richards Award (2012). Leigh has been awarded the 2011 Joan Mitchell Foundation grant for sculpture, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council’s Workspace program, Bronx Museum’s Artist in the Marketplace program, the Art Matters research grant, and the New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship for Sculpture. She was a facilitator of the 2012 International Art Programme at The Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, Nigeria, and the 2014 Asiko School, Dakar, Senegal, organized by Bisi Silva.
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Member Spotlight
Kathleen Adams
by Chanice Hughes-Greenberg

Kathleen Adams has been a Studio Society Member since 2016, but has a long family history with The Studio Museum in Harlem. Adams is also one of the partners behind local food favorite Angel of Harlem, and is an active and dedicated community member.
What inspired you to get involved with the Studio Museum?
I’ve always been involved with the arts—on the performance side as a dancer studying ballet, hip-hop, modern, jazz, and African. In terms of visual practice, I’m trained as an architect but I don’t practice, though I’ve always loved to paint. I’ve always loved art. Growing up in Ohio, I was surrounded by a great community of strong African-American leaders and movers and shakers, but really didn’t see many artists.

My aunt Jacqueline Bradley has always been a huge supporter of the Studio Museum. As a kid I remember going to her brownstone in Harlem. They had amazing artwork and at that age, I didn’t understand how great these artists are. Now, in the context of being an adult, it’s phenomenal that she was able to help inspire me.

What is your favorite part of being a Member?
I like being on the pulse of up-and-coming artists. I remember going to Jordan Casteel’s open studio and seeing her work and seeing her grow, and then I felt as her work was becoming more well known, I was also being more well known as a restaurateur in the neighborhood. It was cool to see young women like us doing things in the community.

I feel like a lot of the time people think that artists are not accessible, but the Museum really makes artists accessible. I don’t feel intimidated or I like I can never collect their work one day, or get to know them. The Studio Museum presents artists in such a way where you can talk to them, get to know them, understand their work, and understand their vibe, and that’s something I never really experienced at any other institution.

How will the new building factor into the community?
I think it’s going to bring more attention to the Museum because the architect [David Adjaye] also did the Smithsonian Museum [National Museum of African American History and Culture]. We’ve definitely outgrown the space, so having a place that’s larger that can hold more community programs will definitely serve the community in a positive way. At the same time, young people will see the groundbreaking for the new building along with the construction process, and every single day they’ll walk by and say, “Oh, what is this, what’s going on?” It’s time for a fresh face, it’s the fiftieth anniversary year!

How important is it for you to be involved in your local community, as both a business owner and a Member of Studio Museum?
Living in Harlem gives me the opportunity to live, work, breathe, eat, drink, survive, and thrive in one single space. The Studio Museum whets my artistic appetite and I fuse that with my restaurateur lifestyle. Angel of Harlem is only three blocks away from the Museum, and I have tourists or Harlemites asking after they come to brunch, “What’s going on in the community, what should I check out?” I always recommend the Studio Museum. I think in some ways it’s an unsung hero if you’re not involved in the art world, and there’s so much amazing programming: family programming, free community programming, spoken word poets—it’s not just visual art. I feel that a great day in Harlem is something that everyone always talks about in terms of historic Harlem—and you can’t talk about historic Harlem without talking about the Studio Museum.

Can you share a favorite Studio Museum-related memory?
I’ve always loved the Uptown Fridays, that’s always been my favorite. I went to college and grad school here in New York and I always loved going to them because you saw the most funky-dressed people dancing and interacting, having a fun time. You’re able to explore the current exhibitions at the Museum too, it’s so fun that it’s a party and a learning experience.

Why was it important for you to join Studio Society?
I’ve always given to the Studio Museum, ever since I’ve had an income—when you’re younger you give what you can give. I’m proud to be able to support the Museum at the level that I am able to because without the support of the community, without the support of donors, emerging artists aren’t supported. I’m really passionate about Harlem, I’m really passionate about supporting artists of color in marginalized communities, and I can see directly where my support is going. I also like meeting a diverse group of professionals. There are lawyers in Studio Society, there are doctors, curators, artists, restaurateurs, teachers—it’s such a melting pot of people and we all support the same mission and the work that the Studio Museum is doing, and that’s why I love it.

As a young person, I often don’t see many young people involved in supporting the arts. I’ve made it a mission to try to be engaged on my social media pages because that informs my peers about the amazing institutions that I support and the great work they do. I think that’s the future of philanthropy, social media–driven or peer-driven.

We are the younger generation of the Studio Museum right now, but we’re the next level of movers and shakers, because we’re investing in the Museum now and growing with it and helping set the course of the future. As I evolve as an individual, I hope to be able to give at a higher level. It’s about the progression of support and every dollar counts: giving $5, giving $25, just the fact that you give is what matters.

Photo: Kirstin Boncher

Member Spotlight
Global Council
Studio Museum Heads South
by Joshua Bell
This February, The Studio Museum in Harlem traveled to the United States debut of *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, and then to the closing weekend of *Prospect.4: The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp* in New Orleans.

Lauren Haynes, formerly a curator at the Studio Museum, is now curator of contemporary art at Crystal Bridges, and was pivotal in bringing the exhibition to Arkansas. *Soul of a Nation* features the work of sixty artists of African descent, ranging from 1963 to 1983, and examines influences, from the civil rights and Black Power movements to Minimalism and abstraction. Though only two works from the Studio Museum’s permanent collection are featured in the exhibition (Tom Lloyd’s *Narokan* [1965] and William T. Williams’s, *Trane* [1969]), the Museum figures heavily in the histories of many of these artists, and as such is a major theme of the exhibition.

The selection of Crystal Bridges as a venue offers an interesting context in which to understand the work. In this quiet rural town—with a Confederate monument in the town square—artists, scholars, collectors, and advocates from the American coasts and around the world arrived in droves. Its presence in this unexpected location has exposed the community of Bentonville and the surrounding region to political, social, and racial themes, and works of art with little or no precedent in the town’s history.

Thanks to the generosity of the Ford Foundation, the Studio Museum was able to include several emerging curators of color from across the country in our visiting group.

Following this, the Global Council departed on its annual trip. This year took them to the closing weekend of *Prospect.4*. Every three years, the city of New Orleans is inundated by artists from around the world who participate in a citywide triennial called Prospect. This year’s triennial was presented under the artistic leadership of Trevor Schoonmaker, chief curator at Duke University’s Nasher Museum of Art.

The theme, *The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp*, was inspired by the beautiful lotus plant that takes root in the fetid mud of swamps. The lotus refers to the natural location of New Orleans, a city surrounded by bayous, lakes, and wetlands. The flower is symbolic of enlightenment, suggesting the possibility of overcoming arduous challenges to produce something beautiful while also alluding to the city’s unique cultural landscape as a creative force.

The triennial has featured an incredible number of artists of African descent in past iterations. This year saw the participation of seventy-three local, national, and international artists, including Barkley L. Hendricks, Derrick Adams, Kahlil Joseph, Kara Walker, and Xaviera Simmons. While participating artists presented a broad range of international perspectives, the works made and selected seek to resonate with the city of New Orleans—aesthetically, musically, culturally, historically, and environmentally.
Recent Acquisitions
Emerging Artists, Young and Old

by Joshua Bell
Three times a year, The Studio Museum in Harlem’s Acquisition Committee meets to consider new additions to the Museum’s permanent collection. Established in 2001, the Committee has had an incredible influence on the direction and growth of the collection, has acquired hundreds of works, and has allowed the Museum to more substantially support artists of African descent—with a particular focus on emerging artists and our artists in residence.

Historically the Committee has almost exclusively collected from Museum exhibitions. However, as we enter into this new moment in our history, the curatorial team has been given an opportunity to broaden the scope of how the Committee collects. This February, the Committee purchased two works: ephemera from Sherrill Roland, *The Jumpsuit Project*, 2017; and Mavis Pusey, *Puriv*, 1968. Both works are incredibly important additions to the collection.

In 2012, while in the first year of his MFA studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Roland was wrongly convicted of a crime that occurred in Washington, D.C. He was sentenced to a year in prison. Roland was eventually exonerated, but not before serving ten months and two weeks. Initially hesitant to discuss his ordeal, he ultimately dealt with the trauma by creating a performance piece about it. During the second year of graduate school, he wore an orange jumpsuit around campus to provoke conversations about how people view those who have served time in prison, wrongfully or otherwise.

*The Jumpsuit Project* has developed into interactive performances in which he lays orange tape down on the floor to approximate a prison cell and then discusses his experience with those who step inside. The project takes place during a rising national epidemic of mass incarceration, with a particular impact on people of color. Engaging in the performance allows participants to discuss their experiences with candor and intimacy that is both powerful and enlightening.

Roland’s work was exhibited in *Fictions* (2017–18), an exhibition of emerging artists from across the country and the final exhibition held in our current home. The Museum’s acquisition includes a jumpsuit, orange duct tape for the prison cell, and photographs documenting two of Roland’s performances by *Expanding the Walls* alumnus Alvaro Escalante (2017).

Few people have heard of Mavis Pusey. At 89 years old, she has been widely and persistently under-recognized as an important figure in American art, beginning in the 1960s. Although her work has been exhibited in few exhibitions, her abstracted and nonobjective works were pioneering at the time. Her geometric shapes were a departure from the emphasis on figurative painting associated with many black artists the 1960s place her among radical artists such as those in Smokehouse Associates. Pusey also studied printmaking and worked in the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop.

Born in Jamaica in 1928, Pusey has lived and worked in New York, London, Paris, and, ultimately, Virginia. Her time in each place has had an influence on her work and style, which has embodied the energy and shapes of each. The acquisition of *Puriv* into our permanent collection is a landmark moment, not only for Pusey’s career, but also for the Museum. She holds a pivotal place in the canon of art history, and placement in our collection is an important step in giving her the recognition she deserves.
Holly Block created a world in which art is meaningful and accessible, and worked tirelessly to make that vision a reality. She refused to bow to preconceived notions of what an art museum could or should be. She made the world a better place through the many lives she touched, and she found her calling as a dynamic director of art institutions, at Art in General and bookended by her leadership of the Bronx Museum in New York.

She became the director of the Bronx Museum in 1985, and assumed the role of curator of off-site galleries. Her intent, from the start, was to make art more accessible—her convictions regarding the importance of diversity, inclusiveness, and community outreach were ahead of their time. She also was adamant about the global nature of contemporary art, something she championed from the beginning of her career. While at the Bronx Museum, she established an annual “Art in the Marketplace” seminar, which offered career guidance to emerging artists, as well as an exhibition of their work at the museum.

Holly took the role of director of Art in General in 1988. Over the next decade and a half she organized exhibitions and staged work by thousands of artists from around the world. Her remarkable vision was that art was for all, created by all. She truly believed in access to the arts, and made it happen for countless viewers of contemporary art.

In 2006, she returned to the Bronx Museum. As a museum director in the twenty-first century, she advocated for an institution that was simultaneously open and rigorous, charted incredible paths through global contemporary art, and welcomed and represented local artists and communities. Her championing of free admission in 2012 was a paradigm-shifting statement about the responsibility of arts organizations and their leaders to translate their values into meaningful change. It also increased annual attendance from 25,000 to 100,000 visitors. The next year, the Bronx Museum sponsored the exhibition representing the United States at the Venice Biennale.

Holly was a visionary curator and museum director. Her profound impact on the field will be felt for decades to come. Many people make broad statements about outreach, inclusivity, and access, but she put these words into action. She provided an incredible example of an arts professional who lived and worked with undeniable integrity and rigor, coupled with an infectious energy and generosity of spirit. The Studio Museum in Harlem recognizes this commitment and remembers Holly’s life and work for its integrity and excellence. She will be truly missed.
When one walks through the galleries and offices of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, there are constant reminders of the daily force of Kynaston McShine. Kynaston was a curator who spent more than forty years at MoMA, beginning in the late 1950s. He organized some of the most important exhibitions of the second half of the twentieth century, and carved out a legendary place within the fierce, utopian art world he would define.

On a Tuesday, I stopped by my colleague Lucy Gallun’s office. She’s a curator in the photography department and we talked about her upcoming Projects exhibition with Gauri Gill, who has photographed an Adivasi community in India’s western state of Maharashtra. In Gauri’s vivid color images, her collaborators go about their daily lives—sewing a blanket or selling onions—adorned with traditional animal masks made of papier mâché, which rather than depicting gods and deities as they typically would, here stand in for loved ones or familiar objects. For many years, Kynaston was the supervisor for the Projects series, which was founded in 1971 as a refuge for recently made work and offered important opportunities for contemporary artists including Lorna Simpson (1990), Carrie Mae Weems (1995), and Steve McQueen (1998), among many others. In hearing Lucy’s enthusiasm to bring this work to New York, I was reminded of Kynaston taking me out for lunch soon after I started working at MoMA in 2014, and him continuing to make arguments about whose work should and shouldn’t be hanging on the museum’s walls.

By that Friday, I was keen to sneak away to the galleries during the final days of Christophe Cherix’s, the head of the drawings and prints department, installation for Adrian Piper: A Synthesis of Intuitions, 1965–2016. I remember Piper’s contribution to Kynaston’s 1970 exhibition INFORMATION. She made a new work titled Context #7—a visitors’ book composed of a binder filled with blank, loose-leaf pages, in which museumgoers were requested to respond to the materials, the museum context, or their general state of mind. People made their internal monologues public: One visitor remarked, “Thank you for giving me the opportunity to remain anonymous.” Others added their comments, much as I might respond to a post on Instagram today. Piper’s work in Kynaston’s exhibition was not the only work that anticipated contemporary forms of global communication technology. INFORMATION, an international survey of work by younger artists that would come to define the nascent conceptual art movement, asked how artists working across the world might develop an art language irrespective of media that could communicate broadly about the pressing questions of their time. Summarizing the stakes of the show in his catalogue essay, Kynaston wrote, “It may seem too inappropriate, if not absurd, to get up in the morning, walk into a room, and apply dabs of paint from a little tube to a square of canvas. What can you as a young artist do that seems relevant and meaningful?”

Heading back to my desk on the opposite side of the museum, I passed by Peter Doig’s 2004 Lapeyrouse Wall. The painting is set in Port of Spain, Trinidad—where the artist lived as a child and continues to work today—and was given to the museum in honor of Kynaston, who was born and educated on the Caribbean island. A lone figure walks away from the viewer, flanked by a white-and-crimson wall and the open road, covering himself from the bright sun with a spotted umbrella. Behind the wall is the namesake of the image—the Lapeyrouse Cemetery, an eighteenth-century burial ground. Above the horizon we see mountains and shrubs, and an indistinct shape sending up smoke signals. Histories of great people are often recorded as lists of accolades in obituaries or stories told at memorials. Their impact, however, remains everywhere, in the nearly invisible forms of care they showed to the people and things around them.
A pioneering abstract painter, Jack Whitten thrived on experimentation and invention. For Whitten, it was always about experimentation and being aware of what's going on. For more than half a century, he pursued the possibilities of paint, material, tools, and technique. While constantly evolving his conceptual practice, Whitten remained proudly political, committed to exploring weighty issues and intent on lifting up the legacies of fellow African-American artists and cultural figures in his work. A pioneering and inventive abstract painter, Whitten died on January 20, 2018. He was seventy-eight.

“As an abstract painter I work with things that I cannot see. We can only feel its presence. That's why I say art runs parallel to religion. It's an act of faith,” Whitten said, when Jack Whitten: Five Decades of Painting (2014–16), the first exhibition to survey the artist’s entire career, was on view at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. “All art is about perception. My paintings teach me how to live. It forms the structure of my world view. That's what abstraction does for me.”

Born in Bessemer, Alabama, Whitten enrolled as a pre-med student and Air Force ROTC cadet at the Tuskegee Institute. On campus, at the George Washington Carver Museum, he learned about the groundbreaking scientist, who also painted. Whitten has said, “I'm convinced today that a lot of my attitudes toward painting and making, and experimentation came from George Washington Carver. He made his own pigments, his own paints, from his inventions with peanuts. The obsession with invention and discovery impressed me.”

Whitten sought to find his artistic voice as the civil rights movement was unfolding. In 1957, he met Martin Luther King Jr. at the Montgomery Bus Boycott. After Tuskegee, he attended Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he participated in a 1960 march to the state capitol protesting segregation and the arrest of students who staged local lunch counter sit-ins.

At Cooper Union in New York, for the first time, he was the only black student in his class. Robert Blackburn, who managed the Cooper Union print room and took an interest in Whitten, introduced him to other black artists, who became mentors, such as Romare Bearden. Bearden in turn sent Whitten to see Jacob Lawrence and meet Norman Lewis.

He graduated from Cooper Union in 1964, a period when many young black artists struggled to determine their purpose and balance a desire to make important, complex work while reflecting their experiences and the state of race in America. Given that Bearden and Lawrence already had mastered narrative painting, Whitten said he felt more confident eschewing figuration and representation, and began to chart his own path in abstraction. He kept a studio downtown, where he was exposed to key figures in the field. In addition to Lewis, he knew Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline. Through Al Held, he met Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman.

Whitten carved out his own niche in postwar American art, masterfully demonstrating with each new body of work how abstraction can document and gesture toward social, emotional, and political experiences. He conveyed content through materiality.

His methods were always novel. Early on, he traded brushes for ordinary objects and tools, pushing and pulling paint with afro combs, large-scale squeegees, and the sharp edge of a carpenter’s plane. More recently, casting acrylic in molds and slabs broken into fragments he called “elemental matter,” Whitten used paint as collage, creating dimensionality.

Cultural currency registered throughout his oeuvre, from early memorial paintings honoring King and Malcolm X and later tributes to jazz legends, black intellectuals, and fellow painters in his “Black Monolith” series, to subjects ranging from the September 11 terrorist attacks, the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, President Obama, metaphysics, and digital technology.

On September 22, 2016, President Obama honored Whitten with a National Medal of Arts. Presented at the White House, the citation lauded “Jack Whitten for remaking the American canvas. As an abstract artist, he uses ‘casting,’ acrylic paints, and compounds to create new surfaces and textures, challenging our perceptions of shape and color. His powerful works of art put the American story in a new light.”
In Memoriam
Peggy Cooper Cafritz
by Studio Editors

Peggy Cooper Cafritz was a trailblazer in the fields of art and education for over five decades. An amazing supporter of artists of African descent, including countless Studio Museum alumni, she profoundly shaped the landscape of contemporary art in the United States.

Cooper Cafritz founded the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in 1974. It evolved from a workshop she began while still a student at George Washington University, and went on to become one of the leading art-intensive high schools in the country. Last year, Thelma Golden, Director and Chief Curator of The Studio Museum in Harlem, sat down with Cooper Cafritz to discuss her unparalleled collecting career, the legacy of Duke Ellington School of the Arts, and the origin of her unquenchable curiosity and creativity. A true friend of the Studio Museum, we will miss Peggy Cooper Cafritz greatly.

Thelma Golden: The Duke Ellington School of the Arts is the Peggy Cooper Cafritz that we all know. Your reputation around Ellington and what it meant and its founding is worldwide. I’m curious, though—what is the seed that started your collecting?

Peggy Cooper Cafritz: I was always acquisitional.

TG: What was the first thing you acquired?

PCC: Some members of SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] at Howard University would have tables set up in front of Crampton Auditorium with African masks, which they were selling. These guys would travel to Africa and bring back original art to sell, to finance their membership and activities in SNCC. A lot of white kids could drop out of school and go down to Mississippi and be activists. Many black kids didn’t have this option; they had to make the money to cover their costs. I was drawn to the beauty and the quality of some of these masks. I also thought that I was in some way becoming a part of change through my collecting. That was the serious beginning.

TG: Were you living with these artworks that you acquired?

PCC: Oh, yes. They were immediately on the walls of wherever I was living. I met Warren Robbins, who had been collecting African art for years with the intention of creating a museum. But he was selling art too. He offered me a number of things, and sometimes I could afford them and sometimes I could not. In the very beginning, I still had an allowance, and my father supported me extremely well. Then my dad passed away in November 1969. I had just been in law school a few months, and I had to move out of my apartment by the end of the month because I didn’t have any money to pay the next month’s rent ...

TG: You and your siblings lived through this incredibly transformative moment where who we were, and who we could be, changed in five-year increments.

PCC: As I look at my own family, Mario went to Middlebury and Georgetown, and then the next children went to mostly GW [George Washington University]—almost a hundred percent GW. Then my son went to Harvard and Andover. It was an expected trajectory that every generation should be better than the next, that we should be better than the last.

TG: That was our responsibility as Black people in this country. Did you consciously set out to create a collection of African American artists and artists of African descent?

PCC: Yes. There were several reasons. One, I always wanted to have kids. I always had kids around me. I love kids. I had been working with them since I was seventeen. I thought it was so important for us to see ourselves in the context of beauty, and things that would make us question. I always knew that—that I would surround them with beauty and our history from the very beginning.

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The Board of Trustees and Director of The Studio Museum in Harlem extend deep gratitude to the donors who supported the Museum between July 1, 2016, and June 30, 2017. We look forward to providing a list of our Fiscal Year 2018 donors in the Fall/Winter 2018–19 edition of Studio.
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<td>Jack Zulack</td>
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**Individual**

- Jeanette Adams
- Angela Adusah
- Rana Al-Hallaq
- Deborah W. Allen
- Justin Allen
- Sister Khuumba Amo
- Liz Arnez
- Keith D. Amparado
- D. Faye Anderson
- Valerie Anderson
- Felicia Appenteng
- Mary Ellen Arrington
- George Arterberry
- Hilary Apare
- Dr. Kenneth Ashley
- Michael D. Atkins
- Grace H. Ayannu, M.D.
- Jacqueline A. Bailey
- Ajamu Baker
- Hilary M. Ballon
- Veronica Banks
- Dr. Juliet Barker
- Maris Beard
- Thomas Beard
- Anne Beckman
- Marian Beglay
- Caroll Belloni
- Stacey Billups
- Keith Bishop
- Yolande Black
- Cynthia Blanchard
- Radha Blank
- Shaun Blayton
- Stephen Blum
- Dr. Nicholas Boscamp
- Retha Boston
- Charles M. Boyce
- Eleanor Boyon
- Charles Bradford
- Angela Brown
- Cedric Brown
- David S. Brown
- Shanthé Brown
- Sidney J. Brown
- Gavin Browning
- Laura D. Brown-Sands
- Klaus Burgel
- Cathleen Campbell
- Carolyn Carter
- Orlandarette M. Carter

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**Sanjeanetta Harris**

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**Diane Jacobsen**

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**Cheryl R. Riley and Courtney Sloane**

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The Studio Museum in Harlem makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of its list of Members. If your name is not listed as you prefer or if you believe that your name has been omitted, please let us know by contacting the Development Office at 212.864.4500 x221 or membership@studiomuseum.org.
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Individual $1500
— Studio Society is comprised of an extraordinary group of individuals who are dedicated to supporting black art and culture. Studio Society members engage with leading artists of African descent and other members, while enjoying a full calendar of events. Members of the Steering Committee play a leadership role in service to growing support of the Museum.

For additional information, please contact the Studio Museum’s Development Department at 212.864.4500 x221

Photo: Scott Rudd Events
Visitor Information

Our galleries are temporarily closed as we prepare for the construction of our new museum—from the ground up!

In the meantime, our programming is happening throughout the neighborhood through our inHarlem initiative. Check out studiomuseum.org for event and exhibition information, and to learn more about our offsite programming in Harlem.

You can still visit us at 144 West 125th Street to shop in the Museum Store and get more information.

Check studiomuseum.org for the latest updates.

Follow us on social media!

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