Letter from the Director

On the evening of September 24, 1968, The Studio Museum in Harlem opened its very first exhibition with a reception celebrating Tom Lloyd: Electronic Refractions II. By all accounts it was a lively celebration attended by founders and friends, artists and neighbors. They came together to celebrate this new space in Harlem devoted to showing and nurturing black artists. A radical undertaking had become a reality.

Fifty years later, on September 24, 2018, and over the days that followed, our Museum family showed their love and support as only they can. The anniversary and related media coverage led to an outpouring of heartfelt messages on social media that completely blew us away. Artists, alumni, visitors, and friends responded with remembrances of their experiences with the Museum over the years (as well as a slew of champagne and raised-hands emojis).

While likes and retweets are a very 2018 way to mark an anniversary, they remind us that the Studio Museum has meant so much to so many over the past five decades. In this issue, we explore the many ways the bright future for artists of African descent our founders so boldly envisioned has become a reality, and talk with some of the amazing people who have been our leaders and partners on this amazing journey. In the following pages, you’ll find scholarly reflections from Dr. Kellie Jones and Connie H. Choi; reminiscences from past artists in residence and education program participants; firsthand accounts from our esteemed past directors Edward S. Spriggs, Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell, Kinshasha Holman Conwill, and Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims; and much more.

While the object you hold in your hands is most definitely analog, the celebration will continue digitally. We invite you to share your own stories of the Studio Museum’s impact using #studiomuseum50years.

I extend my deepest thanks to all of the Studio Museum’s many communities: local, national, and international; online, in print, and in person; past, present, and future. We couldn’t be where we are today without you—and you are absolutely essential as we look to tomorrow.

Thelma Golden
Director and Chief Curator
Explore eight sculptures in Marcus Garvey Park, now through June 2019
Black Refractions

A traveling exhibition highlighting a rich selection of works from the Studio Museum’s unparalleled permanent collection

January 15–April 14, 2019
Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, CA

May 24–August 18, 2019
Gibbes Museum of Art, Charleston, SC

September 13–December 8, 2019
Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamazoo, MI

January 17–April 12, 2020
Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA

May 9–August 2, 2020
Frye Art Museum, Seattle, WA

August 28–December 13, 2020
Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, UT

Barkley L. Hendricks
Lawdy Mama, 1969
The Studio Museum in Harlem; gift of Stuart Liebman, in memory of Joseph B. Liebman 1983.25
50th Anniversary Issue

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Membership Information
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Visitor Information

The Studio Museum’s building at 144 W. 125th Street is closed for construction of our new museum.

Studio Museum 127, our temporary programming space, is located at 429 West 127th Street between Amsterdam and Convent Avenues. Opening hours are Thursday through Sunday, 12 to 6 pm.

Our inHarlem initiative also presents exhibitions and events at a variety of partner and satellite locations in Harlem. Other programs take place at additional partner locations throughout the city and beyond. Visit studiomuseum.org for full details on specific programming.

Follow us on social media!

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Check studiomuseum.org for the latest on our exhibitions and programs.
Find Art Here brings high-quality reproductions of artwork from the Studio Museum’s permanent collection to schools, libraries and service centers throughout Harlem.  

Launching Fall 2018  
Learn more: studiomuseum.org/findarthere

Jordan Casteel
Kevin the Kiteman, 2016
The Studio Museum in Harlem; Museum purchase with funds provided by the Acquisition Committee 2016.37
Photo: Adam Reich
Studio is now online
studiomuseum.org
Ancient to the Future

by Dr. Kellie Jones

The Studio Museum in Harlem came into being as a space to support artists of the African diaspora, who, throughout history, had been largely shut out of exhibition and commercial opportunities. The Museum opened during a time of unbridled protest in the world of culture, both in formal terms as traditional painting and sculpture gave way to assemblage, Pop art, Minimalism, and Conceptual art, and with young artists and artists of color demanding entry into museums, insisting that public institutions be more responsive to the diversity of contemporary cultures in the United States.¹
As a result of such activism, the Studio Museum; the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, Boston; and El Museo del Barrio, New York, among others, were founded, all around 1968. These organizations distinguished themselves as museums to showcase fine art and were different from those established earlier in the 1960s dedicated to broader representations of history and culture.2

During its first decade, the leadership of Directors Charles Inniss, Edward S. Spriggs, and Courtney Callender set the parameters of engagement for the Studio Museum. The roster of exhibitions provided a mix of significant historic and solo shows for African-American artists (Jacob Lawrence: Toussaint L’Ouverture Series, 1969) and considerations of the diaspora (Afro-Haitian Images and Sounds Today, 1969). An early commitment to multidisciplinarity supported film and filmmaking, along with art training in workshop settings.

The Museum drew its name from a third feature, what would become its signature Artist-in-Residence program. The brainchild of painter William T. Williams while he was completing his MFA at the Yale School of Art, New Haven, the idea was for artists to engage with an urban community and audience by way of the Museum, another way to put art at the reach of everyday people and to effect change in the environment and in the thoughts of neighborhood residents. Additionally, the location of artist studios at the heart of the institutional setting and the building itself also speaks to the advocacy of artists of African descent that the Studio Museum has performed.3

The launch of the Studio Museum and its programs was overseen by Charles Inniss, a figure from the business world who had most recently come from Dun & Bradstreet Corporation. Interestingly, Inniss was also a member of the Army National Guard, serving in the storied Harlem-based 369th Artillery Battalion, aka the Harlem Hellfighters.3

With the Museum’s location in New York City, the epicenter of an international art world, current trends in abstract painting and sculpture of the period initially took hold. Tom Lloyd, the first artist in the Studio Program, the forerunner of the formal Artist-in-Residence program, was known for his work in new media and electronic technologies.4 Though the works are abstract, Lloyd stressed the urban elements of his projects, in particular their relationship to the city’s streetlights and its power grid. The title of another early show, X to the Fourth Power (1969), was based on an algebraic equation, demonstrating a mathematic calculation that similarly led to abstraction in the work of featured artists Melvin Edwards, Sam Gilliam, Steven Kelsey, and Williams.

This focus on abstraction and technology during the first years of the Studio Museum did not match up with what some thought of as representative of Harlem, particularly in the heady days of the Black Arts Movement. Following the one-year tenure of Inniss, the leadership of Edward Spriggs occurred near the zenith of black
nationalism. With degrees in studio art and art history from San Francisco State College, Spriggs was a founding member of Black Dialogue, a key Black Arts journal on the West Coast. A poet, painter, and filmmaker, Spriggs moved to New York City in 1965 to be a part of Harlem’s Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School and began as the Museum’s Director in 1969.

Under Spriggs’s leadership, the institution developed important profiles of master artists such as the nineteenth century’s Henry Ossawa Tanner while expanding its reach nationally and internationally. Shows highlighting art from the African diaspora took on greater prominence, such as that of Abdias do Nascimento, a painter and important intellectual force in Afro-Brazilian thought. Another exhibition featured the work of Skunder Boghossian, an Ethiopian painter and legendary professor at Howard University in Washington, DC, one of a handful of historically black universities with a major art department and gallery program. Howard was also the home of painter Jeff Donaldson, founder of the group AfriCOBRA, which penned manifestos on art making within a black-nationalist framework. Shows of Howard faculty and AfriCOBRA are significant during this time, as well as, unsurprisingly, those of West Coast artists (Eleven from California, 1972).

During this period, Elizabeth Catlett emerged as one of the significant artists of the Black Arts Movement, exhibiting in the United States after a hiatus of two decades while she had lived in Mexico. Art historian Richard J. Powell has called her exhibition at the Museum during 1971–72 an “artistic homecoming.”

Following Spriggs’s departure in 1975, Courtney Callender led the Studio Museum for two years, continuing its solid stream of programs that included a historical African-American focus (New York/Chicago: WPA and the Black Artist, 1977) and projects on Africa (Ancestral Vibrations: Stone Churches of Ethiopia, 1977). As the institution was beginning to outgrow its space at 2033 Fifth Avenue, Callender’s biggest accomplishment was fighting to keep the Museum in Harlem and close to its roots and mission of serving that community.

During its first ten years men helmed the Museum; however, over the next four decades four amazing women—Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell, Kinshasha Holman Conwill, Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims, and Thelma Golden—built on and advanced a black exhibitionary complex, cast the Museum as an engine of art history, and moved this culturally specific institution into the next century. Between 1977 and 1988, Campbell solidified the importance of the solo show, not just as a celebration of singular black achievement but also as an apparatus to alter American art history. Countless groundbreaking exhibitions used this model, including those for Hale Woodruff and Barkley L. Hendricks. For Rituals: The Art of Betye Saar (1980), the Museum provided the artist with the opportunity to move into installation and greater participatory practice. As Campbell narrates, Saar shifted from the altar
form as a “new type of object” to a room-size installation predicated on different kinds of engagement by both artist and viewer, creating a new “approach to experiencing that object.”

Perhaps most importantly, Campbell oversaw the Studio Museum’s move from its home above a liquor store at 2033 Fifth Avenue to its iconic location at 144 West 125th Street in the early 1980s. Located on that storied street and business corridor, the Museum remains rooted in the center of Harlem, a key site of the black world. Opening in summer 1982, the new building was the work of J. Max Bond Jr. and his firm Bond-Ryder Associates, which had designed the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, another significant landmark of Harlem’s intellectual power.

Bond transformed a site donated by the New York Bank for Savings into the premier museum of the black world. From a six-story office building, Bond-Ryder created proper gallery spaces. They embedded a central location for artist-in-residence studios, making it a fulcrum of the Museum’s physical space as well as the philosophical mission. Archives and a museum shop were also new features.

The opening trifecta of exhibitions in the new location set the stage for what was to come in Campbell’s decade of leadership. *Images of Dignity: A Retrospective of the Works of Charles White* (1982) presented a long overdue reconsideration of one of the country’s most well-known African-American artists. The impressive overview *Ritual and Myth: A Survey of African American Art* (1982) highlighted the black visual tradition in seventy works by forty-five artists through paired visions of the fantastic and the sacred. The show embraced a wide spectrum of makers from the academic to the self-taught, African, and Caribbean practitioners, with the greatest focus given to contemporary African-American artists. The James VanDerZee archives, for which the Museum became the custodian in the mid-1970s, was celebrated in *Harlem Heyday: The Photography of James VanDerZee* (1982–83). It offered the iconic beauty of the Harlem Renaissance captured in the photographer’s studio as well as through his photojournalism practice.

In addition to insisting on a broader notion of the fine arts by making photography central to its exhibition roster, Campbell also standardized the *Artist-in-Residence* program, instituting an annual exhibition of the participants’ work. Under Campbell’s leadership, the generation of black American abstractionists was reembraced through solo shows of work by Edward Clark, Melvin Edwards, Sam Gilliam, Alvin Loving, Howardena Pindell, and Jack Whitten.

With an MBA from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, in hand, Kinshasha Holman Conwill arrived at the Studio Museum as Deputy Director in 1980. She became Director in 1988 and continued to place importance on solo shows by master African-American artists such as Emma Amos, William T. Williams, Norman Lewis, Archibald Motley, and Romare Bearden. With an exhibition of work by Jean-Michel Basquiat, the Museum began to turn toward a legion of emerging artists.

Having come to know New York City well during her almost two decades at the institution, Conwill collaborated with many cultural partners across the city, such as the Caribbean Cultural Center and the Bronx Museum of the Arts (*Transforming the Crown: African, Asian, and Caribbean Artists in Britain*, 1966–1996, on view 1997–98) and the New Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art (*The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s, 1990*). In 1990 the Studio Museum organized one of the first major projects of contemporary African artists at the Venice Biennale. In 1995 Conwill oversaw the inauguration of the Museum’s sculpture garden.

Lowery Stokes Sims would serve as a guest curator for *Wifredo Lam and His Contemporaries, 1938–1952* (1992–93) and *Art as a Verb: The Evolving Continuum: Installations, Performance, and Videos by 13 African-American Artists* (1988–89, co-curated with Leslie King Hammond), before coming to the Museum as Director in 2000. An art-world legend, she had started her career at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1972 as an Assistant in the Education Department, eventually becoming that museum’s first African-American curator. When Sims left the Met in 1999, with her vast amount of experience, she was the logical choice for Director. Sims’s focus was on both the strategic growth and scholarly profile of the institution. Her exhibition *Challenge of the Modern: African American Artists, 1925–1945* (2003) argued that the struggle for black visual expression in the early twentieth century should be seen as part of an intellectual history and that these artists’ imaginings as agents of creative transformation be placed within canonical art-historical frameworks. As Sims explained:

> The greatest challenge to recognizing the contributions of black people to modernity would, ironically, be encountered within contemporary art circles. Despite the fact that modernist genres such as abstraction were grounded in African art, and given that black dance and music had ushered in a modern sound and sense of the body, the work of J. Max Bond Jr. and his firm Bond-Ryder Associates, which had designed the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, another significant landmark of Harlem’s intellectual power. Bond transformed a site donated by the New York Bank for Savings into the premier museum of the black world. From a six-story office building, Bond-Ryder created proper gallery spaces. They embedded a central location for artist-in-residence studios, making it a fulcrum of the Museum’s physical space as well as the philosophical mission. Archives and a museum shop were also new features.

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African-American artists and artists of African descent were positioned as followers and imitators of white artists recognized as the pioneers of modernism. For the artistic mainstream, modernity in culture and art was co-existent with social, economic, and political sovereignty and power. The colonial positionings of the “civilized” and the “primitive”—a mirror of the “West’s” relationship with the rest of the world that had been in formation since the era of the Encounter and Exploration—established the vocabulary for a discourse that maintained, even supported, the power relationships of colonialism in the art world: the “center” versus the “periphery,” “intellectual” versus “emotional,” “objective” versus “subjective,” “technological” versus “manual,” “conscious” versus “unconscious,” and “individual” versus “communal.”

In terms of programmatic focus, this academic framing of a twentieth-century past was matched by reaching out to current and more diverse generations of artists in the twenty-first century—a shift that has been the work of Thelma Golden, who arrived with Sims as Chief Curator in 2000 and has flowered as the Museum’s latest chief visionary.

As the Studio Museum anticipates the completion of its new home, it is exciting to picture how architect Sir David Adjaye will construct something that has been imagined for centuries: a permanent site to recount the history of the African diaspora. As early activists and educators understood, the museum was an excellent place to narrate black selfhood, whether civic, national, or international. Adjaye, an architect of global renown, has studied diasporic spaces and modern architectural ideals all over the world. In many ways, Adjaye celebrates and advances some of the ideas that Bond launched in the 1960s, during the activist era in which the Museum was born. In contemplating Bond’s redesign of the 144 West 125th Street edifice and its transformation from a chamber of finance to one for fine art, one can find what Adjaye terms the “resignification of materials,” whether as interventions in or changes of the use of spaces, or through repurposing materials in innovative ways. If some of Bond’s earliest buildings were created in Ghana, one of his final projects was a collaboration with Adjaye and others on the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC.

Like Bond, Adjaye believes such public buildings should be welcoming, addressing communities in a fashion that bespeaks institutional availability. These locales should offer, through the environments they create, a sense of democratic access reminding one of their openness to the “ritual of people’s lives.” In The Studio Museum in Harlem’s new building, we eagerly await such a “new urban room for the city.”

Installation view of Frequency, 2005–6, the second exhibition in the Studio Museum’s series of “F” shows committed to the work of emerging artists of African descent.
This essay is dedicated to all those who made the idea of The Studio Museum in Harlem into a reality “ancient to the future,” the title of a 1987 album by the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Thanks to Madeline Weisberg for research assistance.

3. The Harlem Hellfighters were known for both their valor during World War I and bringing jazz culture with them around the world in the early twentieth century. Inniss would go on to run the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation and direct the Brooklyn Children's Museum and the Staten Island Zoological Society. He would also serve on the Studio Museum Board.
4. This program provided funding for the creation of new works and apprentices to assist in their making.
8. After leaving the Studio Museum, Callender was an executive in public television at WNET in New York. Following his turn as Director, Spriggs relocated to Atlanta, where he worked for both the Southern Arts Federation and Fulton County Arts, taught at Spelman College, and founded, in 1988, Hammonds House Galleries and Resource Center, where he served as Executive Director.
9. Campbell completed her Ph.D. at Syracuse University, New York, while serving as Executive Director.
13. Ritual and Myth was organized by another significant curator and art historian, Leslie King Hammond, C. Daniel Dawson and Deborah Willis collaborated on Harlem Heyday. My own time at the Studio Museum spanned this era; from 1980 to 1983, I worked as an intern and later an Assistant Curator.
15. Campbell left to become the commissioner of New York City's Department of Cultural Affairs in 1987. In 1991 she joined New York University as dean of Tisch School of the Arts and in 2015 became the tenth president of Spelman College, a historically black college dedicated to educating women and with a strong commitment to the arts.
22. Ibid., 187.
23. Ibid., 100.
A Legacy of Leadership

by Elizabeth Gwinn

The Studio Museum in Harlem’s fifty-year history has been made possible by innumerable staff, board members, supporters, artists, neighbors, and collaborators. As we celebrate their many accomplishments, we also salute the leaders who have guided the Museum to this exciting moment. Our past Directors, Edward S. Spriggs, Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell, Kinshasha Holman Conwill, and Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims, all generously agreed to be interviewed and to share their personal perspectives and stories about their time at the helm of the Museum. Their comments are edited and condensed here.
How did you come to be the Director of the Studio Museum?
The Studio Museum in Harlem has a very interesting beginning story.
This was a very exciting thing that was going on in Harlem, this emerging museum that was being spoken of. It involved a generation of young people who were introduced to Harlem by Betty Blayton-Taylor, who was an early founder of Studio Museum. They got very interested in the idea of creating a space for young artists in Harlem to expose their work, their art. And it took off from there.
Harlem had a history of wanting a museum that goes back to the 1920s, I think, and the interest in that idea was great in the community.

I was very active in the community at that time. James Hinton, a photographer and filmmaker, had been in conversation with me for a number of years. We had a film company called Harlem Audio Visual, and Hinton was really the leader of that. Charles Hobson was on the Museum’s board, a real respected media person, and there were a couple other people who were really aware of all the dynamics around the struggle of black art or artists and art institutions, which were very few and far between, except on a grassroots level. So I guess between James Hinton and Charles Hobson and Betty Blayton-Taylor and Ted Gunn and one or two other people, somehow my name got into the mix.
Jim kept asking me to consider trying to do this thing. I said, “Look I’m not a museum person, I never ran a museum. I love it here on the streets, what we’re doing now. It’s great.” So he kept working on me and as the days rolled on I said, “You know, this would be something, an opportunity for me to really do something that would be lasting.” So, long story short, I was just in the right place at the right time, as the old saying goes.

*Harlem Artists ‘69* was the exhibition I came in on. I wanted to come in on a show that had some relevance and relationship to Harlem. Most of the artists were not really matured in their art yet, but this was a Harlem show, so this is what I’m going to come in on. I said, “Great, throw on my dashiki, let’s go.”

**What was your vision for the Museum? What are you most proud of?**

I saw the promise of what they were thinking about when they said “Studio Museum”—I mean, it’s just perfect. The idea was that it had to have a real connection with artists. I had a community of artists around me who were willing to do this. The idea of a printmaking workshop was something the art community needed. So I brought Valerie Maynard in, a very committed person and very community-focused. Harlem was where she was born and where she grew up. She was a stalwart in printmaking for a long time, and very committed to sharing her work and ideas with the community.

Soon we had four artists working upstairs, and the printmaking workshop. The whole dynamic of that created heavy buzz all over the community. And so we would have an exhibition, the studios would be open, and you’d go up there. You had more than just the exhibitions going on, you’re going to meet artists. And it became a meeting place for artists. The Museum was not probably as formal as it is now but it was very accessible to the community, and that was always important to me.

This was a time when there was a lot of exchange going on with different cultures and countries. And the notion was that these different cultures, living side by side in Harlem, in New York, in the Bronx, and in Queens, they didn’t really know each other, and they didn’t know each other’s art. So this was our opportunity to take a stand in terms of the institution that supported black art—we’re talking art from any country or any community that related to itself as being black.

I’m most proud that we were able to give exposure to a variety of diasporic artists. It wasn’t about, you know, being a museum, or being this, that, or the other. It was about making a human connection with people who were interested in the same things that we were, but out of another culture. Harlem is an international community. And if you think in those terms it opens up a whole lot of other things that you might consider. We were in a place, we were in an international city. New York, it’s got all kinds of people living here, and Harlem’s the capital of the black world. So let’s do things that would welcome other people from other countries, other communities.

I did what I could do, when I could do it, because I was given the opportunity to do it. It wasn’t easy to have a vision in the 1960s and the early 1970s because there was so much uncertainty, about sustainability and so on. But my hope is that the Studio Museum, with regard to whether it changes, or whatever it does, becomes an institution that is able to interact internationally and be a welcoming place for people of diverse communities.

Photo: Pictorial Enterprise
How did you come to be the Director of the Studio Museum? I was working on my dissertation on Romare Bearden and I was asked to do an exhibition of his work at a museum up in Syracuse, where I was in school. I had never done an exhibition in my life. I had no idea what it was to be a curator. But I thought, “I can figure it out.” So I identified the top curator at the museum there and I said, you have to help me. So she helped me put together this exhibition. We opened it to the public and Mr. Bearden and his wife came up to see it. And he liked it. And I thought, “Well, that’s great.” And then I didn’t think any more about that. About two years later, in the spring of 1977, I get a telephone call. My middle son was an infant, and I’m walking around with him in my arms. It’s Mr. Bearden on the call and he says, “I have just the job for you. They’re looking for a Director at The Studio Museum in Harlem.” And my heart jumped because that was where I first saw his work, and I thought, “This is perfect.” So I go to New York. Nancy Lane is on the Board of Trustees, she’s one of the people who interviews me, along with Bertina Hunter, bless her heart, she was wonderful, and a number of other trustees. And lo and behold, I got the job. I came to the Studio Museum on October 1, 1977. I was twenty-nine years old.

What was Harlem like at that time? When I came to Harlem, New York was on the verge of bankruptcy. The year before, there was a big headline in the Daily News: “Washington to New York: ‘Drop Dead.’” And there was a real question about the future of the city: If the city could barely pay its bills, why would it be supporting cultural institutions? And I have to say, the city of New York made a really courageous decision. They decided that they were not going to cut culture. They had to support the city’s cultural life because that was really the lifeblood of New York. It was an incredibly interesting time, because there was so much energy and determination to put the city back together. It wasn’t just Harlem but Chelsea, Brooklyn, the South Bronx, and all different parts of the city that were trying to come up with ways to piece themselves back together and revitalize New York.

Can you tell us about the move from the loft space at 2033 Fifth Avenue to 144 West 125th Street? When I was interviewed for the job, every single trustee who interviewed me said, “We want a real museum.” What they meant by that was, we want to build a permanent collection; we want to have our own building; we want to have programming and publish catalogues. The vision was always tied to the notion of having a place of our own. Now, to tell you how broke New York was in those days—a bank had foreclosed on the building, and it was more expensive for them to hold onto that property than to give it to us. So, they decided that it was in their interest actually to make a gift of this 60,000-square-foot building to the Studio Museum.

We were determined to have a black architect and a black construction firm. Max Bond had his own firm and he was a visionary. Max had a whole idea of what Harlem could become architecturally. So, he gave us a very simple, elegant, and cost-effective design that stood us in good stead for thirty years. It was really incredible. And it came in on time, and on budget, and we loved that, too.

When the Studio Museum moved from the loft to the building, I think it became one of the linchpins for the rebirth and revitalization of Harlem. And we’re now at a point

Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell, Director 1977–87

Photo courtesy Spelman College
where the Museum is reaping all of the benefits of that. All the retail outlets that have come uptown, all the population that has come back to live in Harlem, the restaurants, the other cultural institutions that are thriving in Harlem, have made it an extraordinarily exciting place to be.

Tell us about some of the people you worked with.
While I was there, David Hammons, Alison Saar, and Kerry James Marshall were all artists in residence. That was pretty incredible. I think about all the MacArthur awardees who have been associated with the Studio Museum. What other museum in New York can boast that number of “geniuses”?

The other thing that’s amazing is the number of museum directors and leaders who came out of the Studio Museum: Terrie Rouse, Grace Stanislaus, Deirdre Bibby, Sharon Patton—it was a place that incubated talent.

Kinshasha Holman Conwill was my deputy. I had interviewed, I don’t know how many people to be Deputy Director. Kinshasha walks in and we talked for about five minutes, and I knew she was the one. She not only had been an artist herself, but her husband was an artist, she had gotten an MBA—she just lived and breathed what The Studio Museum in Harlem was about.

And we would get these incredible interns every year—including one named Thelma Golden. The thing that I remember about Thelma is that she came in knowing about art history. Very often we’d get interns and we’d have to also be the starting point for their knowledge about the history of art and being a curator. But it was like she was born knowing that she wanted to be a curator. She wanted to understand the work, the process, the mind, the consciousness of artists. It was such a joy to be around her because she had such a clear sense of herself. And she hasn’t changed. She is still that same person, with an incredible generosity to boot.

I think what’s remarkable about the Studio Museum is that the board, when I came there, was not a rich board. It was a board of ordinary citizens who held an absolute firm belief that they could build a real museum in the center of Harlem and it would be an A-plus-gold-standard museum. Nobody ever wavered from that; we just waited for other people to get on board. And pretty soon, we had a critical mass of people who believed that, too.

Anyway, that was our life at the Studio Museum. I loved it because we were inventing every day. We were inventing how to organize this place, inventing how to get the shows up on time, inventing how to get the catalogues out. And every time we invented we were learning something, too. So it felt like being in a school all the time. That was my best graduate education, ten years at the Studio Museum.
How would you characterize the Studio Museum during your time there?
That’s a big question! I came to the Museum when we were on Fifth Avenue and 125th Street, and I was there through the renovation and expansion in the new building. The Museum was everything. It was a community center, an artists’ circle, a forum for amazing conversations and intellectual discussions, a meeting ground, a vibrant place that had a lot of owners. I think this has stayed true for the Museum. I saw it as a center of life not just in Harlem, but also of New York, and, in some ways, the center of a much larger black world and art world.

Being at the loft was an exercise in great imagination and creativity. The space itself, when animated by the artists in residence, our wonderful education program for kids, or the annual book fair, was this bustling place full of a lot of people and great intellects. It was a place where everything seemed possible, but it was leap-of-faith possible, because in that little loft the promise was very much in our minds and in our hearts.

How did the institution change when you moved to 144 West 125th Street?
I felt that we were literally in a spotlight. We were across the street from the State Office Building, so the elected officials were right there. The Apollo Theater was down the street, the Schomburg was ten blocks north. We had been kind of on the edges of some of the
most important African-American cultural organizations around. And then, we were right in the middle of it. So there was increased attention, there was a lot more visibility, a lot more visitation. The expectations of what we would be for a variety of audiences really grew exponentially.

Who were your visitors?
Our visitors were a terrific mix. We always had a lot of schoolchildren. We had tourists, not like Harlem has now, but there was always someone who found their way up to Harlem because we were in a community that was vaunted, that was known. People came to find what really existed—and also what existed in their minds. They knew that Langston Hughes had a home up here. They knew this was the neighborhood of James Baldwin. Some of them knew that Faith Ringgold was from Harlem. So they came to find that mystical Harlem.

One of the things that I always loved was that every opening was full of artists. To have Romare Bearden hanging out at an opening was just beautiful. Every time there was an exhibition, the artists in Harlem and in New York would come. It was almost like a homecoming every time that happened. And we had supporters, corporate supporters, foundation supporters, but always a core of the community and a core of people who loved art.

What were some of your challenges?
It was a challenging time, a very ideologically stratified time. The so-called culture wars were going on. There were people railing against certain artists. We did an exhibition with the New Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s. We exhibited Andres Serrano, who had been so excoriated by the right. We had David Wojnarowicz do a performance in our galleries. We had James Luna and Luis Jimenez. Marcia Tucker and Nilda Peraza and I, with our brilliant curators, decided to shake it up, to have certain artists uptown who people thought would be downtown. Every time we did a program that was a kind of downtown program, some uptown people would say, “Why are you doing that? You’re supposed to be showing black artists; these aren’t black artists.” It was a time of great contestation, but it was also a time when I think the Studio Museum really broke open the canon and expanded the consciousness of people around what art was, and where the role of black artists stood in that discussion.

How would you describe the Museum’s relationship to Harlem?
I think that the Studio Museum, from the earliest days, was a place that Harlem owned. Surely by the time I arrived, in 1980, there was a sense that “This is our museum.” And we opened our doors to community; we wanted to be a meeting ground. We always commemorated World AIDS Day. We brought our programs right out into the street. We actually had information about safe sex. There were some people who thought, “You’re a museum, why are you doing this?” But we often did it with artists. One year Glenn Ligon did a program with us. Maren Hassinger did a great program on Dr. King’s birthday and it drew a huge crowd. The thought was that this is for everyone, but it starts first with being for Harlem.

The Museum was a place where one day you could have Miles Davis, and then you could have James VanDerZee and Adrian Piper and Elizabeth Catlett. And every year, there were brilliant young artists who have continued to make their mark. In the years that I was there we had artists in residence such as Alison Saar, Kerry James Marshall, Colin Chase, Leonardo Drew, Nari Ward, Candida Alvarez, and we had artists who were not in the program like the wonderful Dawoud Bey—artists who are part of Harlem, who changed Harlem, who drew from Harlem, who breathed Harlem. While it was a challenge to be as audacious as the Museum was—as it still is—at the core of Harlem is a beating heart of, an embrace of, culture.

Harlem was then, and I think is now, a place where the past is never the past, as Faulkner says. The past is never over—it’s not even the past. The past and the present and the future existed together. It was a figurative, mythic place, and it was also, day to day, a working community, a place where people struggled, a place where people suffered, and a place where, ultimately, people believed.
What were you doing before you came to the Studio Museum?
I had been at the Metropolitan Museum for twenty-seven years. I joined the Met in 1972 and worked for about three years in what they called “community programs.” That was an interesting place to be, because the department had been started in response to community dissatisfaction with the Met, particularly the Harlem community, over the 1969/70 Harlem on My Mind exhibition. This was a sort of first wave of a diversification and outreach in museums. We did a lot of outreach through exhibitions and workshops. In retrospect, it was a very important phase of my career because I started making contacts with my peers and colleagues in different institutions, and meeting artists, which really served me when I became a curator in 1975.

I had been aware of The Studio Museum in Harlem almost from the beginning of my career. When I got to New York, I became close friends with Courtney Callender, who was the Director of the Museum at the time. Courtney was not your typical director—he was kind of like, one of the gang. He was the blithe spirit who led things on. And he had lots of connections with the city. He was an agent for change, for support of artists. He really got the Museum from its beginnings to the next phase, which started with Mary Schmidt Campbell.

The Studio Museum was an important second home for me because it was a place I knew I could come and meet my African-American peers. I did several projects with the Museum over the years, including a wacky exhibition in 1977 called Living Space, which was about public housing. I served on panels, and worked on an outline for a Norman Lewis show. So I always had an active relationship with the Studio Museum.

How did you see the Museum take shape over the years?
I think that the Studio Museum, el Museo del Barrio, the Bronx Museum, and the Queens Museum were institutions that I had a lot of contact with when I was in community programs. It was fascinating to see each one of them change over the years. Each one of them, in turn, found buildings that announced that they were more permanent than even their founders probably thought they would be. For the Studio Museum, moving into the building at 144 West 125th Street was big deal. The space declared that we were important! I have distinct memories of a group of us, it was Howarden Pindell, myself, my friend Raenelle Garris, and two other women primping to go to the opening of the new building. Back in those days, going to Harlem was a big adventure—and getting cabs to take you was a big adventure. But we were all so excited to walk in and see what Max Bond had done. And then watching the Museum over the years—it was such an important place.

When Thelma and I came in 2000, it was a moment when a lot of those organizations were approaching thirty, thirty-five years. The art world had kind of caught up with them in terms of diversity, so people were asking us, “Do you still need a Studio Museum?” And we said, “Yes.” We needed an institution that was looking after our community twenty-four-seven, instead of just in February when you have Black History Month.

It was a key moment. Thelma had been cultivating a generation of artists who were reaching maturity. Harlem was changing—coincidental with our coming, Bill Clinton had opened his office up here. It was a key moment in Harlem and for black artists domestically and globally. We basically ran with it,
and started a lot of programs that people really pay attention to now, like *Expanding the Walls*. The way that Sandra Jackson-Dumont and her staff conceived of that program brought together in the Museum a number of components that before would not have been together. First of all, it focused us on the Museum’s collection of James VanDerZee. Second, it was a program for youth at a time when everybody was very concerned about K–12 education. And it was conceived as being intergenerational, which was really important. So the fact that these students could come for a year and dialogue with artists, talk about images, and create art that reflected VanDerZee was a very important vehicle to connect the Museum to the community. If the students were going to make photographs that reflected VanDerZee, they’d have to go out into their community, because VanDerZee photographed his community.

We also happened to do a lot of work with making the community aware that we were here. I remember one cab driver who picked me up from a meeting at the Dance Theatre of Harlem. I said, “We’re going to the Studio Museum.” And he said, “What’s that?” He had been driving a cab in Harlem for twenty-five years and didn’t know the Museum was there. Ironically, it had a much more global identity. I remember, I had an intern at the Met who was from some small Russian town in the Arctic Circle and she knew about the Studio Museum. So it was really kind of putting that whole package together. And now, with the new building, it’s really going into its next exciting phase.

**What was the Museum’s relationship to Harlem?**

As I said, on one hand, there were a lot of people who didn’t know we were here. And on the other hand, there were people who felt that it should exclusively be about Harlem. I would have to gently remind them that this was The Studio Museum in Harlem, not The Studio Museum of Harlem. That was the way the Museum had been incorporated.

I think back to talking to young staff members, like Rashida Bumbray, about Harlem as a kind of psychological space that was very important to them as African Americans. I was always struck by that because I thought it was a generational thing. I was very surprised that in the 2000s, there would be a generation of people who would have that kind of romance about Harlem.

I think that the more that we reached out to Harlem, the more we became welcoming place. There were a lot of logistical things we had to do, like reorienting the security staff away from a defensive mechanism, which spoke to old ideas of what Harlem was. The renovation of the facade, which Kinshasha had gotten through the city, was very important. Before, you had this little skinny door and you could see elements of the Museum from the window, but you didn’t know how you could get in. So having the facade let people see what was going on really did open it up. And that was really important for having them feel welcome, and that they could have access to the space.
The Studio Museum in Harlem’s Artist-in-Residence program has always been grounded in specificity of place and a commitment to community. When the Museum opened its 8,700-square-foot loft on Fifth Avenue and 125th Street in 1968, it was the result of efforts made by a diverse cross-section of practitioners—artists, activists, philanthropists, and Harlem residents—who came together around the need for a culturally specific institution that could broaden notions of the past while actively creating space for artists of color in the present. These efforts were further affirmed and crystallized through the Artist-in-Residence program, a proposal that the artist William T. Williams initially conceived of and facilitated as a way to bring artists into a community. By working among a people, the artists in residence would “internalize” aspects of that community and, in turn, create work relevant to it. The residency began in the back half of the Fifth Avenue loft, fluidly sharing a space with the Museum’s gallery in the front. This permeability, a matter of walls, combined with the program’s access to the surrounding Harlem residents, worked to decentralize traditional notions of art and afforded a rare opportunity to artists by upending the hierarchy between practice and presentation through a space for ongoing spontaneous creativity within the institutional environment of the museum. When the Museum moved into the former New York Bank for Savings that J. Max Bond Jr. renovated in 1982, this became even more formalized, fulfilling Williams’s vision, as the artist-in-residence studios became physically and philosophically embedded at the center of the Museum’s building at 144 West 125th Street for the next thirty-six years. On the occasion of our fiftieth anniversary and the next chapter in the Studio Museum’s history, we had the opportunity to ask a few alumni of the Artist-in-Residence program to reflect on their time at the 144 West 125th building. Their responses, which have been edited and excerpted here, create an oral history that is both multigenerational and diverse—a reflection of the program itself and its intricate relationship to place. Throughout this period, the studios shifted from the 124th Street–facing side of the building to overlooking 125th Street; bonds were formed between artists, community members, and Museum staff; and the foundations of artistic practice and community were formed. As we look ahead to generations of artists in residence to come, the stories that follow provide a much-needed look at the past, and a set of lived experiences to guide us into the future.
Maren Hassinger, 1984–85
I experienced the studios with Charles Burwell and Candida Alvarez. Our wall of windows overlooked 124th Street. From that vantage point I saw poverty and drug addiction that I hadn’t seen in Los Angeles. It was at the height of the crack epidemic. Everyone was involved—addicts, sellers, law enforcers, doctors, parents, victims—the entire population.

I cannot say if these events contributed to my belief in equality as a means of salvation, but certainly it was a moment of enlightenment. The content of my work regarding vanishing nature continued, but as time went on after the residency, I let go of “aesthetic” finishes and preserved leaf collages on archival paper. And gradually—over two or three decades—I came to believe that we are as one; all of us are fundamentally the same! And I have found a relationship between the squandering of nature and dehumanizing treatment. We are all worthy of love and compassionate support.

We were given work space, an honorarium, and a concluding show. It felt good. Artists and others from the field came by to look and encourage. We felt like professionals and we became professionals.

I specifically remember a wonderful, wacky afternoon when Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Andy’s bodyguard (a jewelry designer who made pieces to be worn on the back and had an ad in Vogue) showed up unannounced! It was hilarious and encouraging. Andy said my leaf collages were beautiful. We met these folks, and we were part of their profession, too!

Many years have passed since 1984, but the Studio Museum has been an ongoing thread binding me securely to the job. The Studio Museum is a support system that never quits. I have been included in their publication with a design, as well as in interviews. I’ve been in group shows, done interactive performances, and given talks. This year they bought a work, Love. Simultaneously, they supported the production of a huge public work called Monuments in Marcus Garvey Park in central Harlem. Truly, the Studio Museum has always been there for me—and in this way encouraging others to find value in my work!

Photo: Ava Hassinger
Candida Alvarez, 1984–85

It was 1984 and 1985. I traveled almost every day from downtown Brooklyn, getting off the A train at 8th Avenue. The walk across to the Studio Museum was truly amazing, and I savored the cacophony of sounds, smells, and colors. The streets were always busy with vendors and folks going somewhere. Once there, I was greeted by a large loft space divided into three separate working areas. The other two resident artists were Charles Burwell and Maren Hassinger. I remember robust conversations around subjects that included diaspora, community, our individual practices, influences, families, etc. At the time, Maren was preserving rose leaves in rose oil and placing them on paper, twisting brown paper into sculpture, and also working with wire sculptures. Her studio not only smelled good, but it looked great. Charles and I worked with color and mostly paper, although Charles had a specific lexicon of shapes he loved to use and a love of printmaking. I loved using memory and finding new narratives gleaned from my walks to the studio or view out the window on 124th Street. I was proud of all the work I had accomplished, and to have a piece selected to be part of the collection. It was the beginning of lifelong friendships that can be picked up at any time, at any place, even if we spend the rest of our lives in separate cities, or separate countries for that matter. I love them as artists and as human beings. The Studio Museum will always be a special place. It afforded me exposure and a special place to work. The stipend made it possible for me to take a year off and just work. How I miss that now! One amazing highlight was having Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat visit the studio!

Francisco Alvarado, 1987–88

I have never had (or had known of) one-year residencies for visual artists, especially in New York. This is what makes The Studio Museum in Harlem so different. Residencies tend to be too short (one or two months) to be practical. Under the leadership of Director Kinshasha Holman Conwill, Assistant Director Patricia Cruz, and Associate Curator Grace Stanislaus, the artists in residence were given the freedom to create in a very positive and supportive environment. My memories of that year are still very vivid in my mind, from the works I completed to the opportunities to advance my career. Those were difficult times for me financially. But with the Museum’s support I was able to continue my artwork at an important creative moment in my life. I am still in touch with Kinshasha, a supportive force in my art career.
Gregory Coates, 1996–97
Having my studio in Harlem was like going home, no other place like it in the world. That says it all. The Artist-in-Residence program provided me a nurturing community and cultural dedication that understood my stylistic difference.

In 2010 I was invited to Obama City, Japan, as the artist in residence. This was an honor, and I took this opportunity to represent black American culture. My time in the Studio Museum Artist-in-Residence program gave me the power to take on challenges both geographically and socially.

As a black American abstract artist, I know The Studio Museum in Harlem has my back.

Elia Alba, 1998–99
When I did the residency in 1999, my studio overlooked 124th Street. It was an open area and we each had our section within the space. Not facing the movement of 125th Street was important for me at the time. I was creating sculptural work that required a less distracting space. I am not sure I would have created the same work if I had been facing the street. That said, I was addressing the global community in the work, so having immediate access to the activity of 125th Street, with people from many parts of the diasporic world, really informed that work.

The Artist-in-Residence program was a rite of passage for me. It’s the residency that I think all African-American artists and artists of the African diaspora want to be part of. It was very empowering when I became part of the Studio Museum’s Artist-in-Residence family. It validated my practice in a way that no other residency has. The strength of a people is the strength of its community. The residency really connects people through art and history. At the time, it was not like it is today, where collectors, other institutions, and galleries visit and follow the artists in the program. Nonetheless, it was my first major residency and it offered me the opportunity to be part of its legacy, to expand my practice, and to reconsider the larger community I became a part of.
Dave McKenzie, 2003–04
The Artist-in-Residence program is a year long, but I feel like my residency extends to the present day as well. Whenever I visit the Museum I am instantly struck by the guards, often the first people I interact with, who always welcome me back and note how long it has been since my last visit. Each and every time I am reminded of and embraced by the generosity and support that permeate all levels of the institution.

While I was in residence I worked on We Shall Overcome, a performance in which I periodically donned a Bill Clinton mask and walked up and down the 125th Street corridor. Working on 125th Street gave me a view onto this incredibly vibrant landscape and I wanted the work to be a part of that vibrant street life. I think about the view from my studio windows and how that vantage point turned the street life into a stage. I didn’t really understand it at the time, but with We Shall Overcome I think I turned my studio into a backstage of that street scene.

Clifford Owens, 2005–06
In 2005, while I was in residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem, curator RoseLee Goldberg invited me to participate in the first Performa Biennale. She selected a project that I initiated while in residence at Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture titled Studio Visits, a work that considers both “the function of the studio,” as articulated by Daniel Buren in an essay of the same title, and the function of the studio visit. For the second iteration of the project, I invited preeminent performance visual artists Patty Chang, Joan Jonas, Carolee Schneemann, and Jesper Just (Goldberg, too) to my studio at the Studio Museum for an intimate, visitor-specific, studio visit–cum–performance. In order to create a more intimate, private (and photographable) studio, I redesigned the space I was assigned for the residency. To my surprise and delight, the redesigned studio was not deinstalled following my residency thirteen years ago.
Karyn Olivier, 2005–06

It was the subtlest, most natural, but obvious thing—being surrounded by black artists, curators, educators, administrators, staff. It felt so normal, pedestrian even, but in actuality was in stark contrast to my experiences in the art world up until then. At my small graduate school, I was the only black student. But the experience at the Studio Museum elevated that experience to another level. It is difficult to articulate the specific impact it had on me, but I know it acted as a salve, an experience that challenged my practice while allowing my confidence to blossom.

I had the privilege of being in residence with amazing artists—Rashawn Griffin and Clifford Owens. They both had such strong, clear-eyed visions of their work, while being infinitely malleable and fluid. My practice was much more rigid; I conceived of an idea and then just worked to realize it. Through observation and many conversations, they taught me the joy of play in the studio and of making room for the unexpected.

During my residency I was thrilled to be part of Frequency and later several group shows with rosters of artists I truly admire and love. Though I don’t get to visit the Museum regularly anymore, I can honestly say that when I do, as corny as it sounds, it still feels like home. This feeling was instilled from the moment we entered our studios—we knew we were being “embraced” and would forever be a part of the Studio Museum family. This sense of community—of folks having your back, being invested in you and your practice, and expecting the best from you—is how I approach teaching young artists. I tell them that if we don’t care about each other and each other’s art and development, how can we expect it of others?

Paul Mpaji Sepuya, 2010–11

The Studio Museum was transformative in giving me the physical space and significant financial help to dedicate myself to making artwork full-time for the first time. I had not yet attended graduate school and had been making work mostly in my home in Brooklyn. So the Artist-in-Residence program is where I learned how to work over the long term in a studio, as a photographer who is interested in the expanse of related material generated by my portrait projects. There, I developed the methods of production, accumulation, revision, and reincorporation that I continue to work with.

Looking out of my window each day at 125th Street really kept me in sync with the rhythms of the neighborhood. The plaza outside the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Building—African Square as it’s now called—has a great cycle of music and sound and people over the days and seasons. But I also looked out at that building across from my studio and contemplated Powell Sr.’s role in ousting Bayard Rustin from Dr. King’s civil rights work because of his homosexuality, and the queerness of my own work, and the complicated generations of struggle within the black community.

Besides the community of everyone who works with and maintains the Museum, there’s a sense of community among the alumni of the program, no matter where we find ourselves. I have since moved back to Los Angeles after fourteen years in New York and still feel connected to the Studio Museum. I learned immensely from Simone Leigh and Kamau Amu Patton. Just watching what materialized in their studios, or having conversations and asking questions ... it all helped me grow and mature as an artist, and put the residency into perspective.

In Residence: Artists Reflect
Xaviera Simmons, 2011–12
The Studio Museum is LEGENDARY. There really is no place like it on earth as it is born out of the legacy of American History, American Slavery and American Civil Rights. In a way it’s the visual artistic expression of the lineage of folks like Bessie Smith, Malcom X, Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King Jr, Nina Simone and all of those Black Americans whose ancestors built the country. In that way it’s a place unique unto itself and as such being an artist in residence was an honor.

125th Street has been a personal touchstone in my life for many years as I lived in Harlem as a young person and have seen the landscape of the community shift dramatically. 125th Street historically was an extraordinary landscape, until the 1990s when then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s administration crafted laws downsizing the presence of street vendors. While I was in residence, I found it tough to reconcile the minimal street activity I observed as opposed to my memories of the street which come from my youth/teenage years in New York.

I know the lineage of the museum, and I know many of the former artists in residence personally, so the reality is that the museum has constructed a unique community. We see each other in different capacities on a regular basis and we also exhibit works together in a variety of exhibitions. It’s really a large, diverse and beautiful family.

I worked alongside Njideka and Meleko, so those are epic painters. I love their works and respected both of their projects while we were in residence. I feel influenced by all of the former artists in residence, really, and I am always thankful to be a part of the historical narrative of artists who have had the privileged opportunity to work and exhibit there. And it’s not just the artists past and present who make the museum; it’s obviously Thelma and the legacy of directors, it’s all of the curator’s past and present, it’s the security guards, the maintenance workers, the front desk greeters, the audience, the administrative staff, the magazine and museum preparators. We all work together to give the Studio Museum its particular warmth and inspiration.

Jordan Casteel, 2015–16
I have had the opportunity to experience several residencies in New York, and none were as intimately involved as my time at The Studio Museum in Harlem. From the moment I walked through the doors of the Museum to every time I’ve visited since, I have felt a part of a family and legacy much greater than myself. Those relationships will undoubtedly stay with me forever.

When I was invited to be a 2015–16 artist in residence, I knew that moving to Harlem would be an integral part of my practice. But it wasn’t until I was perched in my studio overlooking 125th Street that the vision for my work came into view. The pulse of 125th Street drew me to build a bridge for myself between the people I saw on the street and the institution I inhabited. I ultimately did that through putting portraits of the living Harlem community on the walls of the Museum and inviting those people to take part in programming. It was street-gazing and engaging that gave me a place to call home—Harlem.

Kehinde Wiley, Titus Kaphar, Abigail DeVille, Cullen Washington Jr., and Eric N. Mack are just a few of the artists who had the same studio space that I got to occupy as a resident. The legacy within the studios was palpable. We all felt cognizant of those who came before us, and those who would follow. Having that history and my fellow residents nearby meant I never really felt alone.
EJ Hill, 2015–16
For much of my life, the communities that I claimed (or that claimed me) were largely based on circumstance—on who or what simply happened to be around at that time in my life. For instance, I did not choose to live in the neighborhood that I grew up in, and my elementary, middle, and high school choices were made with little to none of my input. I have identified as a “student” for more years than I have not, so I am inclined to examine and speak of my communities within the contexts of educational institutions. These communities, while formed with the utmost sincerity, had to a certain degree always seemed to be comprised of members who had been hastily thrown together and eager to tether—to anything—for the sake of survival.

However, when I arrived at the Studio Museum—an educational institution in its own right—I felt as though for the first time ever, the conditions of my adoption into a community were reliant, in a most precise manner, upon the very fact that I had survived all that came before. And this was my reward. This was my most deserved homecoming.

I do not forsake my memberships within the communities of my younger years, but I realize that the ones that feel most authentic and generative for me now are the ones of Our own design. The ones that are active, deliberate, and specifically designed for Us to shine and thrive.

Autumn Knight, 2016–17
The major difference between this residency and others is the length and location. A year-long residency in New York is such a great introduction to all aspects of the art world. I have taken with me the relationships formed with and through the Studio Museum.

As I worked in my studio, I felt the energy of the past residents in the space. The richness of the conversations among the three of us absolutely impacted my work. I believe we all benefited from the dialogue formed by artists working primarily in three different mediums and representative of diverse parts of the diaspora.

With the studios facing 125th Street, I was directly and constantly confronted with and exposed to the culture myth/reality of ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FIFTH STREET. From that position, I had a balcony seat to the living theater of Harlem’s contemporary culture in conversation with its past. I had to stop during ceremonial/ritual marches against gentrifying forces, high school band public practices, parades, drumming, horns, and the occasional soliloquy. This action and emotion was featured in the video work I created near the end of the residency. I appreciated the reminder to pause and the encouragement to forge ahead amidst this cacophony of voices.

Over the year since I’ve completed the program I’ve found community in conversation with other Artist-in-Residence alums. I also definitely formed a strong bond with my fellow artists in residence, which has expanded geographically as we spread out to different cities.
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| 1993–94 | Bright Bimpong  
Russell M. Hamilton  
Marilyn Nance | 1979–80 | Louis Delsarte  
Jacqui Holmes  
Candace Montgomery |
| 1992–93 | Michelle Talibah  
Bob Rivera  
Nari Ward | 1978–79 | Noah Jemison  
A.J. Smith |
| 1991–92 | David Fludd  
Christopher Wynter | 1977–78 | Willie Birch  
Lee Pate |
| 1990–91 | Ada Pilar Cruz  
Leonardo Drew  
Eve Sandler | 1976–77 | Lloyd H. Stevens |
| 1989–90 | Raul Acero  
Paul Gardere | 1974–75 | Carol Byard  
John Kendrick  
Grace Williams |
| 1988–89 | Willie Cole  
Renee Green  
John Rozelle | 1973–74 | C. Daniel Dawson |
| 1987–88 | Francisco Alvarado  
Cynthia Hawkins  
Linda Whitaker | 1972–75 | LeRoy Clarke |
| 1986–87 | Colin Chase  
Michael Kelly Williams | 1972–73 | James Bernard  
Stephanie Hill |
| 1985–86 | Kerry James Marshall  
Nadine DeLawrence-Maine  
Floyd Newsum | 1969–74 | Valerie Maynard |
| 1984–85 | Candida Alvarez  
Charles Burwell  
Maren Hassinger | 1971–72 | Stephanie Weaver  
James Phillips  
Edgar Fitt  
Justin George |
| 1983–84 | James Dupree  
Sana Musasama  
Alison Saar | 1970–71 | Carol Byard  
John Kendrick  
Grace Williams |
| 1982–83 | Terry Adkins  
James Andrew Brown  
Leon Waller | 1970–71 | Carol Byard  
John Kendrick  
Grace Williams |
| 1981–82 | Janet Henry  
Walter Jackson  
Tyrone Mitchell | 1970–71 | Carol Byard  
John Kendrick  
Grace Williams |
| 1980–81 | Charles Abramson  
David Hammons  
Jorge Rodriguez | 1970–71 | Carol Byard  
John Kendrick  
Grace Williams |

The Studio Museum has made every effort to ensure the accuracy of this list. If you have any corrections, please contact the Curatorial Department at curatorial@studiomuseum.org.

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In Residence: Artists Reflect
A Collection is Born
by Connie H. Choi

The Studio Museum in Harlem opened in 1968—a watershed year that included the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, major anti-Vietnam War demonstrations, Tommie Smith’s and John Carlos’s Black Power salutes at the Summer Olympics, the publication of Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*, the murders of several members of the Black Panther Party, and the police riot against protestors at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago—amid larger discussions of the struggles of disenfranchised peoples around the world and the place of black artists in the art world.¹
The Museum’s founders were a diverse group of artists, activists, and philanthropists all committed to creating an institution in Harlem that foregrounded the role of artists and education, especially during such a tumultuous moment in US history.

Activism among African-American artists increased dramatically in the years leading up to the establishment of the Studio Museum. The artist collective Spiral, originally formed in New York City in 1963 to discuss the organization of a bus to the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, met regularly until 1965 to address both members’ work and pressing social issues. The Harlem Cultural Council, founded in 1964, provided arts programming for the community, with culturally specific arts organizations including the Dance Theatre of Harlem opening in the following years. In addition, the 1965 founding of the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School by the poet LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka) in Harlem is widely considered to have formally established the Black Arts Movement, a flourishing of black cultural production in the visual arts, theater, literature, and poetry in the 1960s and 1970s. Coinciding with the founding of these institutions was the New York Public Library’s threat to close the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in the fall of 1968 and the growing discussions around the planning and organization of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s controversial 1969 exhibition *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968*. In November 1968, the Harlem Cultural Council, whose members included artists Charles Alston, Romare Bearden, and Bruce Nugent, formally withdrew its support of *Harlem on My Mind*, citing a “breakdown in communications” and the emphasis on entertainment rather than culture. The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC) was formed directly in response, raising public awareness of discriminatory practices in the art world through public demonstrations and meetings. These social, political, and art-world upheavals set the stage for the Studio Museum’s opening in September 1968.

The Museum’s inaugural exhibition, at its rented loft on Fifth Avenue just north of 125th Street, was a solo show of Tom Lloyd’s electronically programmed light sculptures. The exhibition, *Electronic Refractions II*, was the first project of the Museum’s Studio Program, in which the institution underwrote the cost of materials to create new works, engaged young apprentices to assist the artist, and showcased the resulting works.

View of the opening of *Electronic Refractions II*, 1968, the inaugural exhibition at the Studio Museum’s first home at 2033 Fifth Avenue.
in an exhibition. Inspired by flashing traffic lights and theater marquees, the sculptures used both everyday materials, such as Christmas lightbulbs and plastic Buick headlight covers, and industrial materials provided by Alan Sussman, a technical consultant who was an engineer at the Radio Corporation of America (RCA). The works, with names taken from racehorses and entirely programmed by Lloyd, received generally positive critical reviews but mixed ones from the public. According to Edward S. Spriggs, who became the Museum’s Director in July 1969, it was too early to be showing Lloyd’s work in Harlem. On opening night, a man verbalized his anger that the Museum was not a “black art museum” before damaging one sculpture, apparently upset that the works did not seem to be by a black artist. It appeared that “Harlem had spoken and was saying that you cannot just bring anything you want to Harlem and press it on us anymore.”

Shortly before his exhibition opened, Lloyd had participated in a panel at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, organized in an attempt to quell early dissatisfaction with Harlem on My Mind. During the panel, Lloyd frequently clashed with several other panelists, including
Sam Gilliam, William T. Williams, and Hale Woodruff, on the definition and importance of “black art.” For Lloyd, his work was “black art” because he was an African-American artist thinking about his community and making his sculptures accessible to that community, something that was perhaps more visible in the process of making rather than in the actual works. While many black artists at the time struggled with the desire to divorce their artistic practice from their political views, Lloyd strongly felt that “art, as far as possible, should be inter-connected with political and social action.” The disagreements among the artists on this panel reflect the diversity of opinions about what it meant to be a black artist working in the United States at the time. The Studio Museum’s early exhibition history reflects these multiple points of view: Invisible Americans: Black Artists of the 30s (1968), organized in response to a Whitney Museum of American Art survey that omitted works
by black artists; Afro-Haitian Images and Sounds Today (1969), which included works by thirty artists as well as Haitian music, documentary slides, and reconstructions of two vodou altars; A Photographic Essay on the Black Panthers (1969), organized by the de Young Museum with photographs by Ruth-Marion Baruch and Pirkle Jones; X to the Fourth Power (1969), featuring work by Melvin Edwards, Gilliam, Steven Kelsey, and Williams; and Harlem Artists 69 (1969), an exhibition that celebrated the work of artists living in the community.

These exhibitions demonstrate the Museum’s ambitious mission, expressed in the prospectus that was printed at the beginning of the annual report for the inaugural year: “The arts can help our cities and the people who live in them to a wider comprehension of human needs. We must learn to understand the great capacity of art to communicate across all manner of human boundaries, not just the lines that divide the past and the present but that separate one way of life and one spirit from another.”11 In its first year, the Museum exhibited shows that reflected on the local community, the national political moment, and an African diasporic artistic presence, and spoke against dominant art-historical narratives. It was originally conceived as a space to create opportunities for both artists to make and exhibit new works and the general public to become involved in contemporary art. Interestingly, in the press leading up to the Museum’s opening, it was announced that “the museum has forsworn a permanent collection, a traditional feature of art museums” in order “to maintain the flexibility by this dual objective,” since “meeting new needs requires a free-wheeling approach, which could, in its view, be impeded by a vested interest in any artist or art style.”12

Thus, the Studio Museum did not begin as a collecting institution. For Eleanor Holmes Norton, then–Vice President of the Museum, “When you have the vested interest of a collection, you lose the desire to innovate. We’re trying to do something other museums aren’t. We want to show new work that the older establishments aren’t on to. And of course that includes artists of all ethnic groups.”13 The gift of Eldzier Cortor’s The Room by a private collector just three years later, then, is surprising.14 Several gifts of works on paper had been accepted by the Museum in 1970, thereby establishing the fledgling collection just two years after the institution’s founding. These gifts, though, were all made by the artists themselves, who were in their twenties and early thirties—over two decades younger than Cortor—and thus the institution’s target demographic. All made around 1970, the works were also politically engaged, most of them explicitly commenting on the status of African Americans in contemporary US society. The Room, painted twenty years earlier, spoke to a different, albeit no less fraught, time. Although the collection now includes works from the early nineteenth century to the present, the painting remained an anomaly within the collection until the late 1970s, when a 1951 landscape by Loïs Mailou Jones was gifted to the Museum.

For the first several years of its life, the Museum actively resisted collecting in order to adhere to its original concept as a working space for living artists, even as it continued to accept gifts of works of art. While the idea of a radical, avant-garde space was commendable, it had to shed most of that identity in order to respond to the immediate needs of its community of
Harlem, thus becoming a fine arts museum. It was not until 1977, almost a decade after its founding and when Mary Schmidt Campbell became Director, that the institution stated a change in its collecting policy. The year before, the Museum had established the Curatorial Council—an advisory committee of artists, educators, and critics including Benny Andrews, Elizabeth Catlett, David Driskell, Jacob Lawrence, Norman Lewis, and Woodruff—who all agreed that building a collection was imperative. Many other artists also encouraged Woodruff—who all agreed that building a collection was imperative. Many other artists also encouraged Woodruff to collect as a way to preserve works of art. With this new focus on the collection, the Museum quickly recognized the need for a permanent facility, rather than the space it had been renting since its founding. Two years after the establishment of a collection policy, the New York Bank for Savings donated its former home on 125th Street between Lenox and Seventh Avenues to the Museum.

By the end of the Museum’s first decade, well over one hundred works had been gifted to the collection, including a painting by Betty Blayton-Taylor, a Museum founder, and several works on paper by both Bearden and Catlett. The collection, however, more than doubled within the next five years as a result of the excitement around the move from the rented loft at 2033 Fifth Avenue to the permanent home at 144 West 125th Street. With the announcement of the acquisition of this site, the institution began to receive major gifts of works from private collectors, dramatically increasing the profile of the collection. At a prominent location in the heart of central Harlem, the new museum provided opportunities for larger exhibitions and programs and expanded storage space, a necessity given the rapidly increasing size of the collection.


3. In the 1950s, LeRoi Jones associated with Beat poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac; co-edited the avant-garde literary magazine Yugen, and founded Totem Press. He published his first volume of poetry, Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note, in 1961. Following the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, Jones moved to Harlem, founded BART/S, and became affiliated with the Black Power movement. He then moved to Newark in 1967 and changed his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka in 1968, the same year he co-edited Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing with Larry Neal.


14. The donor, Katrina McCormick Barnes, was from a prominent Chicago family and was described in 1945 as the “family rebel” who published “a leftist, international monthly” after anonymously giving away $3,000,000. See “McCormick Weds,” Life 18, no. 2 (January 8, 1945): 38, and “Letters to the Editor: McCormick Wedding,” Life 18, no. 5 (January 29, 1945): 4.


16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 6.
Over the last fifty years, The Studio Museum in Harlem has offered a number of school, youth, and family programs for people with specific needs by creating platforms for dynamic educational experiences that encourage critical thought with and through art. In the Museum’s formative years, artist, educator, and cofounder Betty Blayton-Taylor noted, with her fellow cofounders, that students had to travel outside of their communities to visit an art museum. Her commitment to making a space for youth in Harlem to have their own neighborhood museum was a critical part of the Museum’s founding in 1968.
This remarkable programmatic vision created a legacy and demonstrated the importance of educational programs that speak to various needs and interests across communities at the Studio Museum.

Within the first few years of its founding, the Museum established the cooperative school program, which placed professional artists in schools in New York City Geographic School Districts 5 and 6. The Museum maintains this long-standing commitment to local schools by pairing teaching artists with classroom teachers in partnerships that transform classrooms into art-making studios, and enhance curricula through visual, art-based projects.

In 2000, Sandra Jackson-Dumont took the helm of Education and Public Programs and ushered in new models of innovative programming that activated artists’ work throughout the whole building—galleries, workshops, lobby spaces, courtyard, even the Museum Store—with dynamic modes of engagement and interaction between people, makers, and artwork. In 2001, she founded Expanding the Walls: Making Connections Between History, Community and Photography, an intensive eight-month program for high school students for which the Museum’s VanDerZee archives, works in exhibitions, and the permanent collection serve as catalysts for discussions about students’ ideas, perspectives, and questions.

Expanding the Walls positions youth at the center of cross-generational engagement in the Museum by including collaborative photo sessions and workshops with seniors, discussions about art with their peers during gallery tours, and photo-walking tours with young children. Each year, Expanding the Walls culminates with an exhibition of participant work curated alongside photographs by James VanDerZee—a testament to how museums can exist as spaces for amplifying young people’s voices in the world. It has become our banner education program, and sets the pace for how young people can build skills through rigorous engagement with art. This program challenges us to think deeply about how we define community, and how the Studio Museum exists as a place that fosters, in Jackson-Dumont’s venerable words, “a community of thinkers.”

Alongside Expanding the Walls, teen programs such as Words in Motion provide opportunities for teens to work with artists and learn skills for creative expression across disciplines, including DJ-ing, art making, poetry, and spoken word. In Art Looks and Studio Works, artists meet with young people interested in learning more about studio practice, art-making techniques, and portfolio development.

Family programs such as Family Fun and Target Free Sundays: Hands On, create space for children and their families to connect and engage with one another through looking at art and participating in the creative process together. In 2007, the Museum piloted Lil’ Studio, meeting the need for more creative exploration, art making, and storytelling time for preschool-age children and their parents and caregivers. An early partnership with Cool Culture, an organization that provides

Photo: Scott Rudd
free access to cultural organizations for historically marginalized families and their young children, extends our reach to early childhood communities through Family Day programs such as family-friendly tours and parent workshops.

Programs designed for pre-K–12 teachers and educators working in nontraditional school spaces transform the galleries and art-making workshops into labs for investigating methods for incorporating art and artists of African descent into classroom curricula. Educators and practicing artists continue to lead professional development workshops that activate the collection and exhibitions through art making, writing, and performance-based projects that model strategies for integrating art as a vital element of innovative teaching practice.

Arts & Minds, a program centered on meaningful experiences with art in museums for people with Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia, and their caregivers, has opened new conversations about accessibility to the Museum for people with disabilities and specific needs.

The Museum’s long-standing commitment to fostering the careers of emerging curators, educators, and arts professionals dates back to its early years. High school and college students have worked closely with staff mentors on meaningful projects and programs. Paid internship and fellowship positions across departments have helped inform students’ and graduates’ next academic and professional steps, provided exposure to people of color working in the museum field, and contributed to participants’ understanding of the arts and cultural sector. Our own Director and Chief Curator Thelma Golden speaks fondly of her internship in the 1980s with then Director Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell as a catalyst for her career as a curator and leading figure in the field. New initiatives, including the Museum Education Practicum, continue to provide points of access for emerging and midcareer arts professionals across disciplines.

Stepping into the wake of this incredible legacy of educational engagement, I started my first job at the Studio Museum as a museum educator sixteen years ago. Over the years, I’ve had the privilege of holding six different roles in the Education Department, including Coordinator of School and Family Programs, Internship Program Coordinator, Department Manager, and, most recently, Education Director. At the core of each position has been developing creative approaches to fostering connections with art and artists. I will never forget my first gallery tour of The Color Yellow: Beauford Delaney (2002) with a whopping thirty-eight seven- and eight-year-old Harlem summer campers. With a hard gulp and rolled sleeves, I tackled the important challenge of creating space for students to question, respond, experiment, explore, discover, imagine, and walk away with new ideas and perspectives from which to view the world around them.

In our fiftieth year, I reflect again on Blayton-Taylor’s revolutionary commitment to making space in museums for students in Harlem, and on the legacy of education programming that makes our Museum accessible and engaging for all learners. As we look toward a future in our new building, the Museum’s education staff has set the course for investigating new ways to activate opportunities for learning, connection, and leadership through meaningful engagement with art.
Educational program participants, collaborators, teaching artists, and extended family share the impact of their experiences with The Studio Museum in Harlem.

Isaac Bonsu,
*Expanding the Walls* 2018

I still struggle with the realization that my father left me in this world, where it is my duty to be both unapologetically “black,” but also indistinguishably African, leaving no space for what I want to do or even think about doing. *Expanding the Walls* has given me something I haven’t had for seventeen years and eight months: a place to come to terms with my rational and irrational selves, through my photography, but also through talking and sharing experiences. *Expanding the Walls* has also shown me that self-reflection is not a punishment but a path to growth. I remember being in a tug-of-war with my religion and duty, as my mother’s only child with my father, to be supremely successful, and my own inclination just to give up because I felt that I could never be enough. Photography gave me an outlet and it was through the viewfinder that I found a way to express myself—however I wanted. The community here at the Studio Museum has showered me with guidance and affection, and made my life more tolerable and even enjoyable. Throughout these eight months I’ve worked on looking at whatever happens to me as part of my “own path” as Ginny [Huo, Youth Programs Coordinator] says, and on giving my best energy to the world. I’ve worked on what it means to be black, what things like my do-rag and dark skin mean in high society, and how I can make them powerful and attractive through my artwork.

Kareen Dillon,
*Expanding the Walls* 2006

At the age of fifteen I walked into the Studio Museum eager to learn about photography, and *Expanding the Walls* was my yellow brick road to the art world. As an *Expanding the Walls* alum I knew I wanted to give back, so in 2010 I became the program’s college intern, and later a museum educator. This year marks my fourth as an elementary school art teacher, and every academic year I curate the hallways of my school and organize two to three scholar art shows. From the history I learned in *Expanding the Walls* I’ve geared my curriculum to highlight African-American artists who have broken barriers in the art world. Many of these artists were introduced to me while I was at the Studio Museum, and I use them to deepen my scholars’ understanding of art and the world around them. As an *Expanding the Walls* alum I am able to use my voice to build scholars’ social interaction, critical thinking, self-evaluation, and reflection skills. *Expanding the Walls* is my heart and still, to this day, the Studio Museum is my guide to the art world. Year after year it helps keep my art flame burning.

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Isaac Bonsu
Forefather, 2018
Courtesy the artist

Kareen J. Dillon
Run, run as fast as you can, 2006
Courtesy the artist
Monique Schubert, 
Teaching Artist

It is an honor to have the title of “veteran educator” at the Studio Museum. For more than a decade I have led tours and guided art-making workshops for a wide cross-section of folks who visit the museum: adults, young people, children and families, senior citizens, school groups from first grade to graduate school, international travelers, and longtime Harlem residents.

In the Education Department there is a lot of emphasis on engaging the public in the creative process, on having conversations that are directed by the curiosity of museum visitors, and on the practice of deep inquiry that we, as educators, employ to develop a more nuanced understanding of each show and to generate activities that allow visitors to connect with the work through multiple entry points.

One of my favorite aspects of this work has been to witness the empowerment that young people express when they develop their own relationships with art objects, understand the concepts behind them, and emerge with a sense of ownership over their own interpretations and ability to dialogue with art through creative expression. In those moments, young people are teaching me about the power of art, the need for connections across cultures and generations, and the importance of the Studio Museum in both honoring the past and inviting a vision of the future.

Betty Kouassi, 
P.S. 36 Teacher and School Partner

This partnership has been a blessing because the Studio Museum has been committed and consistent in providing professional artists to share their expertise with young children. My school has benefited from student artwork, an extension of the curriculum that demonstrates to families, leaders, and teachers the creativity these children have as a reflection of community. My classroom has been exposed to a variety of materials, artists, and art forms, which has in turn allowed students to create, learn about different artists, and reflect on a piece of art that embodies self-worth and confidence. Most importantly, students are engaged, having fun, and reflecting on their work—all while creating their own masterpieces. The greatest impact of this partnership is that it has allowed students to express themselves.
When I was an intern in the Public Programs Department at the Studio Museum, we often asked, “Who can do what we can’t? Whose work can we amplify? How do we found and maintain generative relationships?” Whereas before I thought little about the role partnerships can play in an institution’s work, I have come to rethink how we can measure success and define community. I came to find these questions not only productive, but heartening: They are the sound of an institution realizing it is not alone and seeking connections that can improve the service it provides to its patrons. I echo these questions even now.

The Studio Museum is always a delight to visit. I like that it is convenient—in the heart of Harlem—and that it exposes families to art, culture, history, and, more importantly, family time. It is important not only to visit museums, but also to engage with them and participate actively. That’s what we get out of our visits to the Studio Museum. The children are happy, laughing, communicating with one another regarding art, and discussing what they learned. The Studio Museum provides ideas that I can use at home during family game night, and it also motivates me to look at art differently. My family and I always enjoy the time we spend at the Museum. Family bonding time, enrichment, and creating lifelong memories. There’s never a dull moment. We enter the Studio Museum with an open mind and leave with artistic knowledge and experience.
When The Studio Museum in Harlem first opened its doors in 1968, the Museum had a strong commitment to producing scholarly materials, most notably exhibition brochures and small catalogues. At a time when black artists were often omitted from mainstream museum exhibitions and publications, these materials offered information not available elsewhere, and have provided resources for future scholars. Out of this dedication grew a robust print program that saw materials produced for the likes of artists Barkley L. Hendricks and Elizabeth Catlett to writer Alice Walker.
In June 1982, the Studio Museum moved to its location at 144 W. 125th Street. The new building and associated programming cemented the Museum’s role as a cultural anchor in Harlem and created a new need for materials to engage the community. While scholarly publications helped insert black artists into the fine art canon, programming calendars, exhibition flyers, and quarterly newsletters helped amplify another of the institution’s priorities: to make art accessible to our neighbors in Harlem.

In our graphic materials over the years, the only constant is evolution. The look of the Museum’s print materials has varied greatly, and often responded to shifting institutional priorities, design trends, the artists and designers the Studio Museum works with, and societal shifts at large. In the 1970s we explored the use of more display type, likely in response to trends, as well as the countercultural movement. In the 1980s, we implemented more traditional serif types, as the materials took on a more conservative tilt to help solidify our presence in the New York art world. But this also aligned with the era that saw Ronald Reagan as president, the devastation of the AIDS epidemic, and a global economic recession. The 1990s were characterized by the introduction of desktop publishing and the early 2000s saw the Museum begin to work more with nationally recognized design studios—as well as founding Studio.

Through all of this, the Museum has consistently created promotional materials that respond to artists’ work and allowed designers to bring their own vision to each project. While this strategy made possible a wide range of creative expression, it did not promote brand visibility or recognition for the Museum. In 2005, the Museum commissioned design firm 2 x 4 to create a new logo that would help to address this concern. With the bold logo, on our iconic slant, the Museum was able to brand its materials in a more consistent way, even as colors, typefaces, and aesthetics changed.

While this helped address some concerns about brand recognition, the Museum’s visual identity was still largely determined by whoever was responsible for creating the materials. This has included creative staff members, freelance designers, and leading agencies.

Leading up to our fiftieth anniversary year, the Museum has expressed a commitment to visually communicating our position as the leading institution for art by black artists. A new website design was launched this year, which allows us to share more programming, art, and articles with our audience digitally. A new staff design position will lead to more in-house capability. Scholarly publication remains a priority as we continue the work of inserting black artists and new scholarly voices into the canon. And in the coming years, we look forward to launching a new brand identity with OCD | The Original Champions of Design, which will allow us to create global brand recognition while staying in touch with our fifty-year history of being responsive to our audience and artists.
RED & BLACK to “D”:
PAINTINGS BY SAM GILLIAM
November 16, 1982 — February 27, 1983
The Studio Museum in Harlem · 144 West 125th Street · New York, New York 10027

Opposite Page:
Catalogue for
Living Space: An Exhibition
on Low Income Housing, 1977

Top:
Poster for Red & Black to “D”:
Paintings by Sam Gilliam, 1982–83

Left:
Poster for Mark Bradford: Alphabet,
2010–11. Design: MTWTF

Right:
Newsletter Quarterly Bulletin, 1982
LIVING SPACE: an exhibition on low income housing

May 1- June 12, 1977

The Studio Museum in Harlem
2033 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10035
Bottom Left: Catalogue for *Ritual and Myth*, 1982, the first exhibition in the Studio Museum's new building. Design: Al Cucci


Bottom Right: Brochure for the culminating exhibition of the 2011–12 artists in residence. Design: Studio Lin
Member Spotlight: Dedicated for Decades
by Morgan Powell and Jodi Hanel

Elaine Carter
Gertrude Erwin
Clara Villarosa
Janice Guy
As the Studio Museum celebrates its fiftieth year, we wanted to highlight a few of the longest-standing Members: Elaine Carter, Gertrude Erwin, Janice Guy, and Clara Villarosa. Each of these Members came to the Museum via their own unique journey, but all have shown an amazing and steadfast commitment to the Studio Museum’s program and community. As the membership program continues through inHarlem, we look forward to providing special Member benefits and opportunities designed around both Studio Museum and partnership programming.
How long have you been a Member at the Studio Museum?

Gertrude Erwin: I’ve been an Individual and Senior Member for seventeen years. I’m a retired educator. I taught in Harlem, was a school principal in Brooklyn, worked as Education Director in the Manhattan Borough President’s Office, and was the Executive Director of the Executive Leadership Institute.

Clara Villarosa: I have been a Family/Partner Member for seventeen years. I’m from Chicago and moved to Harlem in 2000 to be closer to my grandchildren. I opened a bookstore at the Harlem USA retail center, next to the Magic Johnson theater, and then closed shop after ten years of business. We collaborated and cooperated with the Studio Museum, and would inform customers of institutional events.

Elaine Carter: I’ve also been a member at the Studio Museum for seventeen years. I’m now retired, but was an Associate Professor in the Counseling Department at Cheyney University in Cheyney, Pennsylvania. Cheyney has the recognition and distinction of being the oldest black college in this country.

Janice Guy: I immediately became a member when I moved to Harlem in 2006. I’ve been a member for twelve years, and it went without saying that I should support my local art institution. I’m originally from Britain and I lived for a number of years in Germany and Italy before moving to New York at the end of 1991. I have been a Sugar Hill resident since 2006.

When did you first hear about the Museum?

GE: I heard about the Studio Museum at its inception fifty years ago. The opening of the Museum was big news in Harlem.

EC: I’m sure my awareness of the Studio Museum was because of working at Cheyney. Several historically black colleges and universities were and continue to be repositories of African-American art. Henry Ossawa Tanner’s painting, Nicodemus Visiting Jesus (1899), beautifully graced one of the walls in our library for many decades. The knowledge that a black man was the artist of this very important painting was quite gratifying.

CV: I knew about the James VanDerZee exhibition, Images of Harlem (2000), from some time ago.

When was your first visit to the Museum?

GE: I worked at a school a few blocks away from the original site and can remember going to the Museum and being quite excited at this new institution exhibiting work of artists of African descent.

CV: My first visit must’ve been within six months of moving to Harlem. I was impressed with the exhibitions and the presentation. It immediately felt like a Harlem jewel, especially with its affinity for preserving culture.

What made you want to join our membership program?

GE: I joined the Museum to support its work and to enjoy the benefits of membership. I also believe it is the responsibility of the community to support its institutions.

CV: I wanted to join because I appreciate museums and wanted to support this specific institution. I’m very interested in promoting African-American history and literature. Joining was a merging of both missions. If we don’t support it, who will? Whatever we can contribute, we need to do it. One of the things that fundraisers look at is whether or not the community supports and values what they’re raising money for. We must show that we do.

EC: It’s intriguing for me to be part of an art institution that, through its exhibitions, programming, and publications, can teach, educate, and communicate to me about the artists of the African diaspora. The location of the Museum in the heart of Harlem makes it come alive through the pulsating, irregular movements of the people outside, who are in direct contrast to the uniform, regulated steps of the viewers inside.

JG: I was coowner of the former Murray Guy gallery that operated in Chelsea from September 1998 to February 2017. I think it’s so important to support institutions that are preserving and promoting work by artists of African descent.

What has been your favorite exhibition, program, or experience at the Museum in the years that you’ve been a Member?

GE: My most memorable was visiting the artists-in-residence studios and engaging in dialogue with artists. In one instance, I purchased an artwork in the exhibit School Days by Terry Bodie, who was a 1999–2000 artist in residence. It also brings me great joy to see the works of artists I collect hanging in the Museum.

CV: I recall that I loved the James VanDerZee exhibition, Images of Harlem (2000), from some time ago.

EC: My favorite exhibition was To Conserve a Legacy:
American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (1999). The show gave me a firsthand look at the work of many talented and prominent black artists from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

JG: The list of solo exhibitions that have made an impression on me is very long, but if I were to name just one, it would be Barkley L. Hendricks: The Birth of the Cool (2008–09). It was—remarkably—the late Hendricks’s first retrospective, so it was the first occasion for many to see such a large gathering of his audaciously cool oeuvre.

What does it mean to be a Member of Studio Museum and how does your membership contribute to our mission?

GE: It means having great art to view and being introduced to the work of new artists year after year, right in my community. Memberships allow the Museum to keep doing the wonderful work that you do year after year.

CV: It exposes visitors to the Studio Museum; I bring friends and family from out of town. I recently brought guests to the Schomburg Center to see Firelei Baez: Joy Out of Fire (2018)

EC: Continuing my membership with the Studio Museum confirms my ability to be knowledgeable and enlightened regarding visual artists of the African diaspora. Life and art are indispensable … when I’m viewing art, I am experiencing a moment in my conscious life.

JG: I am proud that my membership can contribute to the outstanding programming of this vibrant institution.

What keeps you coming back year after year?

GE: The wonderful exhibits and supporting programs keep me coming back.

CV: I like that the Museum provides exposure and opportunities to black female artists.

JG: There have been so many outstanding solo shows and superbly curated group exhibitions and projects. Through these, we are often introduced to the important works in the collection. Photography is a passion of mine and the Museum’s ample collection of photographic works constitutes such an invaluable document of the history and culture of Harlem. It’s great that this spirit continues through the Expanding the Walls program, too. I am also a keen follower of the Artist-in-Residence program, and have often visited the open studios. The exhibitions of those residents have been a significant point of departure for many great careers.

How would you describe the Museum’s role in Harlem over the past fifty years?

GE: The role, as I see it, is to bring the many past and present artists of the diaspora to the people of Harlem, and for the past fifty years the Studio Museum has done that exceptionally well.

CV: The Studio Museum has been a beacon. It shines a light on the accomplishments of artists who have worked with the institution. The Museum provides opportunity for community to view this work in one location. It should be easy for us to access our work and put it in a space that makes us feel proud.

JG: The Studio Museum has gone from being an essential destination for the residents of Harlem to one of the most important museums in New York and beyond.

All Photos: SaVonne Anderson

Member Spotlight: Dedicated for Decades
New Acquisitions: AfriCOBRA
by Joshua Bell

Left:
Wadsworth Jarrell
Revoluntary, 1972
Edition of 300
The Studio Museum in Harlem; Museum purchase with funds provided by the Acquisition Committee 2018.16

Right:
Barbara Jones-Hogu
Unite, 1969
Edition of 10
The Studio Museum in Harlem; Museum purchase with funds provided by the Acquisition Committee 2018.12
AfriCOBRA (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists), an African-American artist collective, was founded in 1968, the same year as The Studio Museum in Harlem. It was a year of turmoil and change: Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated; riots and protests dominated the Democratic National Convention in Chicago; and the Vietnam War continued to rage, claiming the lives of thousands of innocent civilians and soldiers alike.

Within this milieu, Jeff Donaldson, along with Wadsworth and Jae Jarrell, Barbara Jones-Hogu, and Gerald Williams founded AfriCOBRA in Chicago. The five founding members created an aesthetic philosophy to guide their collective work—a shared visual language for positive revolutionary ideas. They sought to create images that focus on black communities and reflect their shared attitudes and experiences.

Initially, the group met to discuss their common principles, and then set to work individually on group projects, such as creating images of the black family or works based on their adopted slogan: “I am better than those motherfuckers, and they know it.” Ultimately the group evolved to encourage independent work, and turned the emphasis away from aggression against whites and toward positive images of and for the black community. This new body of work was made with mass production in mind, with poster art and screenprinting methods to create editions of their work. The multiples were sold at very low prices—sometimes as little as $10—to ensure that anyone could have access to these works and easily understand them. By utilizing printmaking techniques and advertising methods, the group appealed to and was understood by both the fine art community and a broader audience.

Although AfriCOBRA was founded in Chicago, the group was pivotal to the early exhibition history of the Studio Museum. Edward S. Spriggs, the Museum’s second Director, was an early advocate of the group, and helped coordinate their first exhibition in 1970. This opportunity exposed the collective to a national audience, and educated an entirely new group of people on their aesthetic and intent. However, until recently, the Museum’s representation of work by these artists was minimal.

This past May, the Acquisition Committee—a select group of individuals who consider new additions to the Museum’s permanent collection—met to consider an assortment of works made by Jones-Hogu and one work by Wadsworth Jarrell. In all, five works by Jones-Hogu and the one work by Jarrell were acquired. They are Wadsworth Jarrell, Revolutionary (1972), and Barbara Jones-Hogu, Unite (1969), One People Unite (1969), Rise and Take Control (1970), I Am Better Than These Motherfuckers (Version 1) (1968), and Untitled (1968).

Jones-Hogu’s Unite is a particularly powerful work. Arguably her most well-known piece, Unite depicts a series of black figures with their fists raised. An earring in the shape of an ankh, a cross-like Egyptian symbol, can also be easily spotted. Above them, the word “unite” repeats and overlaps, with the overall shape of the words making reference to a megaphone. The use of printed words and clear imagery, common tropes of the group, also make the work easier to interpret. The subjects are clear and figurative, their strength and power evident.

These works are an incredible addition to the Museum’s permanent collection, and augment our representation of an early and essential group of artists.
Luncheon 2018

Elaine Welteroth,
Jonathan Singletary*
On Friday, April 27, 2018, The Studio Museum in Harlem hosted more than three hundred guests at Spring Luncheon 2018 at the Mandarin Oriental, New York. This year, the Museum honored award-winning journalist and media personality Elaine Welteroth. The Museum’s Director and Chief Curator Thelma Golden was pleased to recognize Welteroth’s trailblazing initiatives during her time as editor in chief at *Teen Vogue*.

Welteroth expanded the publication’s coverage to include feminist, social justice, and political topics, while also spearheading the first *Teen Vogue* Summit, where young women convened for a weekend of activism and empowerment.
Crystal McCrary, Thelma Golden
Tracy Reese, First Lady of New York City Chirlane McCray

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Candida Alvarez, Firelei Baez, Maren Hassinger, Allison Janae Hamilton, Tschabalala Self, Hallie Ringle*
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Julie Mehretu, Agnes Gund

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The afternoon also included remarks from Expanding the Walls participant Khadija Savané, who gave a galvanizing speech on the personal impact of the Studio Museum’s photography residency program for teens. She concluded her remarks with a powerful message to the audience: “ETW has helped me express my full self and has given me the strength to allow others to see that as well. After all, life is like a camera. Focus on what’s important, capture the good times, develop from the negative, and if things don’t work out, just take another shot.”

All proceeds from Spring Luncheon 2018 are critical to sustaining the Museum’s public program and education initiatives. The Studio Museum would like to acknowledge and thank all of the organizations and individuals for their generous support, raising more than $380,000 for the Museum.

Thelma Golden*
All photos by Julie Skarratt, except as noted:
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— 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
Portrait of a Building

Photos by Albert Vecerka
Text by Elizabeth Gwinn
Photographer Albert Vecerka specializes in creating images of the built environment. While much of his work involves documenting newly-constructed buildings around the world, the Harlem resident and City College alum has long been interested in photographing the changing neighborhoods uptown.

One of his best-known bodies of work is a nearly two-decade study of Lenox Avenue between 124th and 125th Streets, tracking its change from a row of boarded-up buildings to a new commercial development. “I would go by and see scaffolding going up, then parts of a building would have disappeared, then the whole building disappeared,” he said in 2015.¹

On the eve of our own monumental architectural change, we commissioned Vecerka to create a portrait of the Studio Museum’s longtime home at 144 West 125th Street. After variously serving as a furniture store, office building, and bank, the 1914 building was renovated by the late architect and Museum trustee J. Max Bond Jr., and opened to the public as museum in 1982. In partnership with the City of New York, the Museum made additional upgrades, designed by Rogers Marvel, in the 1990s and 2000s. Over a series of several visits in 2017 and 2018, Vecerka visited, and photographed, every corner of the building, from our beloved galleries to our staff offices to storage spaces.

Just as it did on the corner of Lenox Avenue, scaffolding will soon go up at 144 West 125th, and the building will ultimately be replaced—but its history will not disappear. Vecerka’s sensitive and insightful images will help us remember our former home, and Bond’s adaptive-reuse renovation that served us so well for thirty-five years. These photographs also remind us that all buildings, including the new one that will rise on the same site, are ultimately defined and brought to life by the people—and the art—inside them.


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