The Studio Museum in Harlem Fact Sheet

Our Mission

The Studio Museum in Harlem is the nexus for artists of African descent, locally, nationally and internationally, and for work that has been inspired and influenced by black culture. It is a site for the dynamic exchange of ideas about art and society.

Our Story

The Studio Museum in Harlem was founded in 1968 by a diverse group of artists, community activists and philanthropists who envisioned a new kind of museum that not only displays artwork but also supports artists and arts education. The Museum was originally located in a rented loft at 2033 Fifth Avenue, just north of 125th Street. In 1979, the New York Bank for Savings gave the Museum the building located at 144 West 125th Street. Renowned architect J. Max Bond Jr. led a renovation that adapted the building into a two-level exhibition space with offices and space for rental tenants. In 1985, the Museum began excavation of an adjacent vacant lot at 142 West 125th Street, leased from the City of New York. Over the following two decades, the Museum, in partnership with the City, completed additional renovations to the building and lot, and added additional gallery and lobby space, a theater and a flexible outdoor space. The Museum has been accredited by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) since 1987, when it became the first black or Latino institution to gain this recognition.

The Studio Museum in Harlem is internationally known for its catalytic role in promoting the works of artists of African descent. The Artist-in-Residence program was one of the Museum’s founding initiatives, and gives the Museum the “Studio” in its name. The program has supported more than one hundred emerging artists of African or Latino descent, many of whom who have gone on to establish highly regarded careers.
Alumni include Chakaia Booker, David Hammons, Kerry James Marshall, Julie Mehretu, Wangeci Mutu, Mickalene Thomas and Kehinde Wiley. The Studio Museum serves as a bridge between artists of African descent and a broad and diverse public. A wide variety of programs bring art alive for audiences of all ages—from toddlers to seniors—through talks, tours, art-making activities, performances and on- and off-site educational programs. Museum exhibitions expand the personal, public and academic understanding of modern and contemporary art by artists of African descent. The Studio Museum is a leader in scholarship about artists of African descent, publishes Studio magazine each September and March, and regularly creates award-winning books, exhibition catalogues and brochures.

The Museum’s permanent collection includes over two thousand paintings, sculptures, watercolors, drawings, pastels, prints, photographs, mixed-media works and installations dating from the nineteenth century to the present. The Museum’s Acquisition Committee facilitates the growth of the collection through donations and purchases. Artists in the collection include Romare Bearden, Robert Colescott, Jacob Lawrence, Norman Lewis, Chris Ofili, Betye Saar, Lorna Simpson, Kara Walker and Hale Woodruff, as well as many former artists in residence. The Museum also is the custodian of an extensive archive of the work of photographer James VanDerZee, the quintessential chronicler of the Harlem community from 1906 to 1983. The Museum does not have a permanent exhibition of work from its collection, but frequently shows selections in temporary exhibitions.

Our Structure and Leadership

The Studio Museum in Harlem is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. We receive funding from a variety of sources, including individuals, foundations, corporations and government. The Museum is a member of New York City’s Cultural Institutions Group and is governed by the Board of Directors, listed below.

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Now in its 50th anniversary year, The Studio Museum in Harlem is preparing to construct a new home on Manhattan's West 125th Street, replacing its current facility with a structure designed expressly for its program by architect David Adjaye. Undertaken as a public-private initiative with support from the City of New York, the five-story, 82,000-square-foot project will provide the custom-built and expanded facilities, enriched visitor experience and strong architectural presence appropriate to a premier center for contemporary artists of African descent, the principal visual art institution in Harlem and a magnet for visitors from around the world. The new building, designed by Adjaye Associates, with Cooper Robertson as executive architects and program planning consultants, will enable the Studio Museum to better serve its growing and diverse audiences, provide additional educational opportunities to museumgoers from toddlers to seniors, expand its world-renowned exhibitions of art by artists of African descent and influenced and inspired by black culture, and effectively display its singular collection of artwork from the nineteenth century to the present day.