

Embodied

Black Identities in American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery

A stylized illustration of a Black woman with a large afro, wearing a patterned garment, holding a paint palette and a brush. The background features a map of the United States with various numbers and colors. The word "Embodied" is written in large, bold, orange letters across the top. Below it, the text "Black Identities in American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery" is written in a smaller, black font. The illustration is a vibrant, abstract representation of the woman, with bold colors and patterns. The map in the background is a light blue and green, with various numbers scattered across it. The woman's face is dark and expressive, with a slight smile. She is holding a paint palette with various colors and a brush, suggesting she is an artist. The overall style is a blend of realism and abstraction, with a focus on Black identity and art.

Embodied



Embodied: Black Identities in American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery

Pamela Franks

and

Robert E. Steele

with contributions by

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**Yale University Art Gallery
New Haven**

Publication made possible by Lois Chazen; Laura M. and James A. Duncan, B.A. 1975; Mr. and Mrs. Elliot L. Schlang, B.A. 1956; Francis H. Williams; the Jane and Gerald Katcher Fund for Education; the Nolen-Bradley Family Fund; the Florence B. Selden Fund; and the John F. Wieland, Jr., B.A. 1988, Fund for Student Exhibitions.

First published in 2010 by the
Yale University Art Gallery
P.O. Box 208271
New Haven, CT 06520-8271
www.artgallery.yale.edu

Published in conjunction with the exhibition *Embodied: Black Identities in American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery*, organized by the Yale University Art Gallery.

David C. Driskell Center, College Park, Md., September 16–October 29, 2010
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn., February 18–June 26, 2011

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Tiffany Sprague, Director of Publications and Editorial Services
Christopher Sleboda, Director of Graphic Design

Copyeditor: Linda Truilo
Set in Greta by Peter Bilak and Franklin Gothic by Morris Fuller Benton
Printed at GHP, West Haven, Conn.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Yale University. Art Gallery.
Embodied : black identities in American art from the Yale University Art Gallery / by Pamela Franks and Robert E. Steele ; with contributions by Anna Arabindan-Kesson . . . [et al.].
p. cm.
Published in conjunction with an exhibition held at the David C. Driskell Center, College Park, Md., Sept. 16–Oct. 29, 2010 and at the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn., Feb. 18–June 26, 2011.
ISBN 978-0-89467-977-3 (alk. paper)
1. African American art—Exhibitions. 2. Blacks—Race identity—United States—Exhibitions. 3. Art—Connecticut—New Haven—Exhibitions. 4. Yale University. Art Gallery—Exhibitions. I. Franks, Pamela. II. Steele, Robert E. (Robert Emanuel) III. Arabindan-Kesson, Anna. IV. David C. Driskell Center. V. Title. VI. Title: Black identities in American art from the Yale University Art Gallery.
N6538.N5Y35 2010
704.03'9607300747468—dc22
2010031482

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cover illustration: Kerry James Marshall, *Untitled* (detail), 2009. Acrylic on PVC. Yale University Art Gallery, Purchased with the Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund and a gift from Jacqueline L. Bradley, B.A. 1979
Frontispiece: Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Untitled*, 1981. Oil stick. Yale University Art Gallery, Richard Brown Baker, B.A. 1935, Collection
p. 11: Romare Howard Bearden, *Village of Yo* (detail), 1964. Collage. Yale University Art Gallery, Leonard C. Hanna, Jr., B.A. 1913, Fund
p. 17: David C. Driskell, *Dancing Angel* (detail), 2002. Screenprint. Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Jean and Robert E. Steele, M.P.H. 1971, M.S. 1974, PH.D. 1975

Reader's note: For dimensions of all objects, height precedes width precedes depth. Unless otherwise noted, for drawings, dimensions are of the sheet; for relief and intaglio prints, the matrix; for planographic prints, the sheet; and for photographs, the image.

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Director's Foreword

Embodied: Black Identities in American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery presents highlights from one of the rapidly growing areas of the Gallery's collection—its holdings of African American art. This exhibition traces common themes among the works on view even as it tests the cohesiveness and boundaries of an expanding field of scholarship. Collaboratively organized by students, the exhibition takes on nothing less than the fundamental question, "What is African American art?"

Over the last several years, the Gallery has regularly presented exhibitions curated by groups of students who are responsible for everything from selecting an exhibition's thesis and its artworks to overseeing its installation, writing for its catalogue, and developing its attendant educational programs. *Embodied* is the first of these exhibitions undertaken in partnership with a public university: three Yale students have been joined on this curatorial team by three students from the University of Maryland, College Park, where the exhibition opens at the David C. Driskell Center for the Study of Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora before returning to Yale. As always with such projects, the student curators have come from a variety of disciplines: From Yale, Anna Arabindan-Kesson is a PH.D. candidate in the departments of Art History and African American Studies; Horace D. Ballard, Jr., received his M.A.R. degree from the Divinity School and Institute for Sacred Music in 2010; and Lei Lisa Sun, B.A. 2010 in Literature, was also a participant in our undergraduate Gallery Guides program. From Maryland, in the Department of Art History and Archaeology, Lindsay S. Henry is an undergraduate; Shana Klein is a PH.D. candidate; and Jonathan Frederick Walz completed his PH.D. this year. This impressive group of young scholars have collaborated willingly to share their unique perspectives and present a very thought-provoking exhibition.

Over the last decade, the number of artworks in the Gallery's collection by African American artists has grown multifold, and the collection now comprises nearly three hundred such objects. In the early stages of planning, the student curators met in New Haven to study these works of art and to visit with Gallery staff members eager to help support them in their work: curators, educators, the publication editor, exhibition and graphic designers, and others. Over time, they worked together to survey the collection and select objects they felt best elucidate how black identities are made visually manifest in American Art. The resulting exhibition and its accompanying publication ask viewers and readers to recognize and question numerous assumptions about African American art.

On behalf of the six student curators, I would like to thank all those who helped them bring this project to life. First and foremost, this exhi-

bition could not have come to fruition without the guidance and mentoring provided to the students by Pamela Franks, Deputy Director for Collections and Education, who oversees the student-curated exhibition program, and our partner in Maryland, Robert E. Steele, M.P.H. 1971, M.S. 1974, PH.D. 1975, Executive Director of the Driskell Center and an integral member of the Gallery's Governing Board. Gratitude is also due to Bob Steele, along with his wife, Jean, for their extraordinary generosity to the Gallery in the form of gifts of many important African American works of art and critical funding for student training opportunities. Without the Steeles' generosity, the Gallery's holdings of African American art would not be nearly what they are today.

Across the Gallery, several staff members provided special assistance. Because many of the works in the exhibition reside in the Department of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs, Elisabeth Hodermarsky, the Sutphin Family Associate Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs, served as an important curatorial liaison for the students and was particularly helpful throughout the planning of the project. Likewise, the other curators whose collections were drawn from provided assistance and expertise, including: in Modern and Contemporary Art, Jennifer R. Gross, the Seymour H. Knox, Jr., Curator; in American Decorative Arts, Patricia E. Kane, Friends of American Arts Curator, and John Stuart Gordon, the Benjamin Attmore Hewitt Assistant Curator; and in American Paintings and Sculpture, Helen A. Cooper, the Holcombe T. Green Curator, and Robin Jaffee Frank, the Alice and Allan Kaplan Senior Associate Curator. Jeffrey Yoshimine, Director of Exhibitions, and Clarkson Crolius, Exhibitions Manager, provided the students with the background they needed to design their installation. Tiffany Sprague, Director of Publications and Editorial Services, offered thoughtful editorial direction for both the exhibition catalogue and its wall texts; John French, Director of Visual Resources, and his staff photographed the works for their inclusion in the publication; and Christopher Sleboda, Director of Graphic Design, designed the catalogue as well as the wall texts in the exhibition, leading students in the process of choosing typeface and color to tell a story and set a tone. Kate Williams, Senior Administrative Assistant in Collections and Education, coordinated the many meetings and ongoing communication critical to realizing this show. Kate Ezra, the Nolen Curator of Education and Academic Affairs, and the staff in the Education Department helped guide the students in developing programming. Staff in Museum Resources and Stewardship met with the students to review public information and development issues. Diana Brownell, Museum Preparator, matted and framed the works on paper in the exhibition. In the Conservation Department, Patricia

Sherwin Garland, Senior Conservator; Theresa Fairbanks-Harris, Chief Conservator, Works on Paper; and Carol Snow, Objects Conservator, prepared the works for travel and exhibition. Amy Dowe and the rest of the staff in the Registrar Department deserve particular recognition for their help in coordinating this student-curated show, the first in the series to travel. In the Business Office, Charlene Senical, Assistant Business Manager, managed the myriad financial details. Finally, Elise Kenney, Archivist, provided specialized and essential research on objects in the exhibition and their history at the Gallery.

Outside of the Gallery, Professor Elizabeth Alexander, who chairs Yale's African American Studies Department, met with the students early on to look at work together and has played an active role in programming. In Maryland, the project could not have happened without the coordination provided by Dorit Yaron, Deputy Director at the Driskell Center, who was involved with every aspect of producing the exhibition. A critical step in the formation of this exhibition was the comparative analysis of installation and interpretive strategies of related exhibitions; the most valuable example of this occurred on a visit to Birmingham, Alabama, where the curatorial group spent time at two of that city's most venerable cultural institutions. I am grateful to Gail Andrews, the R. Hugh Daniel Director of the Birmingham Museum of Art, and the entire staff there, and to Priscilla Cooper, Vice President of Institutional Programs, and Ahmad Ward, Head of Education, at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, for their generous sharing of experience and their hospitality with our team during the visit. Finally, I wish to thank all of the contemporary artists who so graciously provided students with information on their works during the research phase and who kindly provided rights to reproduce their works, especially John Woodrow Wilson, who welcomed the students into his studio.

Projects such as this are central to the teaching mission of both the Gallery and the Driskell Center, and the Gallery is fortunate to have the support of generous benefactors who have endowed funds that support these initiatives. The exhibition and publication were made possible by Lois Chazen; Laura M. and James A. Duncan, B.A. 1975; Mr. and Mrs. Elliot L. Schlang, B.A. 1956; Francis H. Williams; the Jane and Gerald Katcher Fund for Education; the Nolen-Bradley Family Fund; the Florence B. Selden Fund; and the John F. Wieland, Jr., B.A. 1988, Fund for Student Exhibitions. Jointly organizing this project with our University of Maryland colleagues allowed the opportunity for the Yale University Art Gallery to benefit from the perspective of the Driskell Center, with its mission focused on the study and display of African American art. This collaboration also allowed students, faculty, and museum staff across our

two universities to work closely together, fostering an intellectual and collegial community based on direct engagement with original works of American art that will continue for years to come.

Jock Reynolds

The Henry J. Heinz II Director

Yale University Art Gallery

African American Art at the Yale University Art Gallery: An Introduction

Pamela Franks

During the process of organizing *Embodied: Black Identities in American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery*, the six student curators came to think of the Gallery as “a ‘collecting body’ with an educational mission.”¹ Indeed, this project would not have been possible were it not for the Gallery’s active collecting over the last five decades of art by Americans of African descent, which created substantial holdings for the curatorial team to study and from which to select. The representation of African American art in the Gallery’s collection increased steadily over the second half of the twentieth century but accelerated dramatically from the late 1990s onward: during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the number of works in the collection more than tripled. Now numbering between two and three hundred objects, these enhanced holdings greatly broaden the range of the Gallery’s representation of American art in general.

Some of the Gallery’s earliest acquisitions by black artists were prints. *Dark Disciple* by Alexander Brooks Jackson (B.F.A. 1953, M.F.A. 1955) was made in 1954, while Jackson was a student at the Yale School of Art.² This work was one of several by School of Art students acquired that year, and thus likely was considered more in that context than in terms of the ethnic identity of the artist. Over time, works by other African American alumni of the School of Art, such as Howardena Pindell (M.F.A. 1967), Martin Puryear (M.F.A. 1971, HON. 1994), and Barkley Hendricks (M.F.A. 1972), all of whom have work included in the current exhibition, have joined these in the print collection. Two other notable print acquisitions, the 1965 gift of the woodcut *Flight into Egypt* (ca. 1930–50) by the Boston-based African American artist Allan Rohan Crite, whose work often engaged religious subject matter, and the 1967 gift of *Deserted House* (ca. 1935–45) by Charles Henry Alston, the influential Harlem artist and pioneering African American art educator, added these important artists to the Gallery’s collection. These early gifts presaged the robust collecting of African American works on paper that occurred in the decades after their acquisition; today, the Department of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs is perhaps the Gallery’s richest resource for the study of African American art and culture.

The acquisition of three important nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artworks by African American artists illustrates how input from Yale faculty has helped shape the collection over the years. The extraordinary walking stick carved in about 1867 by Henry Gudgell has been a touchstone of the Gallery’s collection ever since its purchase in 1968. Recommended by Robert Farris Thompson, the Colonel John Trumbull Professor in the History of Art at Yale, Gudgell’s cane was purchased in collaboration with the Gallery’s then-director, Andrew Carnduff Ritchie. Professor Thompson has compared the cane to Kongo chiefs’ staffs and scepters and, over the years, has used it to illustrate a continuity of iconography in African and American art. A second carved cane, made around 1916, was acquired for the collection in 1999—again at the recommenda-



tion of Professor Thompson, who called attention to the piece of ancestral cloth attached to the object that makes it a sort of reliquary. Both canes are included in the present exhibition. Along with these two objects, a critical addition to the collection of a nineteenth-century painting by an American artist of African descent was Henry Ossawa Tanner's 1894 painting *Spinning By Firelight—The Boyhood of George Washington Gray*, acquired in 1996. Once again, support from Yale faculty was a crucial facet of this acquisition, which was bolstered by two very different examples of how it would be relevant to teaching: First, as Tanner was a student of Thomas Eakins, Jules Prown, the Paul Mellon Professor Emeritus in the History of Art at Yale, had been using the painting in his Eakins seminar and was thus a strong advocate for its acquisition. Second, adding Tanner's painting to the collection also provided an important resource to Judith Wilson, an assistant professor in the History of Art Department in the mid-1990s, and to her African American art survey class.

In addition to faculty input and course connections, student interest has been a critical energizing force for collecting in the arena of African American art. A key example of the opportunity for students and emerging scholars to help shape the Gallery's collection was the period of concentrated acquisition activity in 2000 in preparation for that year's exhibition *Imaging African Art: Documentation and Transformation*, cocurated by Daniell Cornell, then the Gallery's Florence B. Selden Fellow, and Cheryl Finley, at the time a doctoral candidate in African American Studies and the History of Art at Yale.³ Cornell and Finley proposed many important acquisitions for the exhibition, including Romare Bearden's *Village of Yo*. *Village of Yo*, also included in *Embodied*, is a striking collage by the artist that was little known and not previously published when Cornell and Finley discovered it for sale. The works by Lorna Simpson and Carrie Mae Weems selected for the *Embodied* exhibition, as well as Hale Aspacio Woodruff's *Atlanta-Period Portfolio* (1931-46, printed 1996) and a range of Afro-Caribbean art, were also acquired for *Imaging African Art* and have been actively used for teaching at the Gallery in the years since.

The last decade has been a period of significant collection growth at the Gallery across all historical and cultural fields—and has been equally so for its holdings of African American art, which have more than tripled in number during this time. *Imaging African Art* and its associated purchases were a strong statement early in director Jock Reynolds's tenure of his support of both student initiatives and African American art, and that commitment continues today with the current exhibition. Reynolds espouses a strong commitment to collecting individual artists' work in great depth, thus building the Gallery's capacity to illustrate process and development over the span of a career. For example, in 2000, the Gallery acquired John Wilson's seminal composition *The Incident*, and subsequently, over the course of the last decade, has collected other important examples of Wilson's work, several of which are included in *Embodied*. Similarly, from

2001 to 2003, the Gallery acquired over twenty photographs by James Van Der Zee, two of which are highlighted here, establishing a rich resource for students to explore a broad range of works from this artist's oeuvre.

As is fitting for a museum at a university with an unparalleled art school, Reynolds's leadership has reinforced a strong and ongoing commitment to the work of living artists, and many of the works by African American artists that have come into the collection over the last decade were acquired shortly after they were created. Examples of this trend in the present exhibition include Whitfield Lovell's haunting sculpture *Ode*, made in 1999 and acquired the following year, and Alison Saar's extraordinary sculpture made from baseball bats and pitch, *Bat Boyz*, which was purchased by the Gallery in 2001, the same year it was made. More recently, Kerry James Marshall's untitled painting from 2009 was purchased for the collection after Reynolds saw it in the artist's studio soon after it was completed and, immediately recognizing the significance of this work within both Marshall's oeuvre and the larger history of painting, Reynolds committed to purchasing the work and invited the artist to come to the Gallery as a 2011 Happy and Bob Doran Artist in Residence.

Finally, one of the most important developments in recent years for African American art at the Gallery is the way in which the museum's holdings have been greatly enhanced by the generosity of Jean and Robert E. Steele, who have donated nearly sixty works of art since 2004. Firmly believing that the story of American art is not complete without the integration of the artistic production of African American artists, the Steeles have been collecting in this arena for over four decades, focusing primarily on prints and drawings and bringing together works by artists at various stages of their careers: emerging, midcareer, and established. The Steeles' gifts have been truly transformative for the Gallery's representation of African American—and thus American—art. Gifts of works by artists such as Benny Andrews, Elizabeth Catlett, Sam Gilliam, Glenn Ligon, Kerry James Marshall, Howardena Pindell, Martin Puryear, and William T. Williams complement other works by these artists already in the collection. Other gifts by the Steeles have introduced to the collection important artists not previously represented, such as Radcliffe Bailey, David C. Driskell, Michael B. Platt, and Faith Ringgold. The Steeles' clarity of strategy is most evident in Robert Steele's own words:

Through my involvement with collecting art, and recognition of the role museums play in establishing the canon of art, I have come to realize the crucial role collectors play in the formation and development of museums. If one looks at major art museums, they are, in actuality, aggregates of works from the collections of art collectors, which have been gifted to, or purchased by, museums. Looking at the origin of the Yale University Art Gallery, the core of the collection comes from a gift

of over one hundred works from John Trumbull. Following on the magnitude of Trumbull's donation, Jean and I are embarking on a strategy for giving [to the Gallery] at least one hundred works by African American artists.⁴

Just as John Trumbull's founding gift to Yale was for the purpose of creating the opportunity for students to learn from original works of art, so has the thoughtful approach of Jean and Robert Steele been with the hope and intention that generations of students would have an ever more rich opportunity to consider the full scope of American art at this museum where study and teaching are paramount.

Notes

I am grateful to Elise Kenney, Archivist, Yale University Art Gallery, for her assistance in researching this introduction.

1. See p. 23.
2. For an illustration of this and the other objects mentioned in this essay that are not included in the present exhibition, see eCatalogue, the Gallery's online collection database, available at <http://ecatalogue.art.yale.edu/>.
3. On the exhibition, see Daniell Cornell and Cheryl Finley, *Imaging African Art: Documentation and Transformation*, exh. cat. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Art Gallery, 2000).
4. Robert E. Steele, e-mail to the author, July 20, 2010.

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Collecting African American Art: A Personal Reflection

Robert E. Steele

The American art collection at the Yale University Art Gallery is well recognized as one of the finest held by an institution of higher education. The director of the Gallery, Jock Reynolds, highlighted the importance of its growing holdings of African American art in the 2008 exhibition catalogue *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery*. In his foreword to this catalogue, Reynolds wrote, “We are not as fully representative as all might wish . . . our holdings in African American art are thin. . . . Until relatively recently, [African American artists’] work was not considered important enough to attract the attention of serious collectors. Happily this attitude has changed.”¹ These words served as a springboard for the project *Embodied: Black Identities in American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery*, a collaboration between the Yale University Art Gallery and the David C. Driskell Center for the Study of the Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora at the University of Maryland, College Park.

My involvement in this project has taken place on three levels. The first is through my position as the executive director of the Driskell Center, a position I have held since 2004. The second is through the lens of a collector of African American art. Finally, I am a member of the Gallery’s Governing Board. Even before I became a member, in 2004, I shared my views on collecting African American art with the Gallery’s leadership team as we discussed our mutual goal of highlighting and enhancing the Gallery’s holdings in this area.

As part of two higher-education institutions, the Gallery and the Driskell Center have a responsibility to collect and present African American art. The goals of both the Gallery and the Center, though somewhat different, also have much in common: to encourage the appreciation and understanding of art and its role in society and to strive to build collections for future generations. The project *Embodied: Black Identities in American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery* is a demonstration of these goals.

The Driskell Center has a clear mission related to this field. Founded in 2001, the Center celebrates the legacy of one of the most renowned African American artists working today, David C. Driskell, a University of Maryland Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Art, who has gained recognition not only as an artist but also as an art historian, collector, and curator. The Center is devoted to collecting, documenting, and presenting African American art and to providing an intellectual home for artists, museum professionals, art administrators, and scholars who are interested in broadening the field of African diasporic studies. To this end, the Center is committed to replenishing and expanding the field of African American art and is dedicated to promoting the inclusion of African American art within the larger canon of American art.

While the Driskell Center collects only African American art and the art of the African diaspora, the Gallery’s permanent collection is encyclopedic, and its American art collection is much broader and more



inclusive. It includes works that represent a variety of American artists from different geographic regions, cultures, religions, and traditions. It does not necessarily intend to represent a definitive survey of American art. Instead, like many other collections in similar museums, it tells the story of American art, in part through the eyes of a generous group of donors composed of alumni and friends, who gifted or bequested art to it. As such, they are partners with the Gallery's team in crafting a fuller narrative of American art.

Many of the works by African American artists at the Gallery—some of which are included in *Embodied*—were recently added to the collection. Under the leadership of Jock Reynolds, the number of artworks by African Americans has greatly increased, as he has spearheaded the initiative to expand the footprint of African American art in the Gallery's collection. These objects highlight the contribution of African American artists to the canon of American art. Why should a higher-education institution or museum collect African American art, as opposed to “just” American art? What is the rationale of singling out ethnicity, race, or religion as a basis for collecting and/or exhibiting art by a specific group of people? As American culture becomes more and more diverse, there is a growing need to focus on diversity in institutions of higher education; this need for diversity is also reflected in the American art scene. By collecting, documenting, and presenting works by artists of specific groups, the institution provides affirmation and legitimacy, not only to that group of artists but also to the larger group of people they represent.

What is, then, the role of African American artists within the canon of American art? In the foreword to *David C. Driskell: Artist and Scholar*, Keith Morrison wrote that the framework of African American art was set by three people: Alain L. Locke, James A. Porter, and Driskell.² In the 1920s, Locke addressed the conceptual basis of black America's visual arts. Several decades later, Porter added the foundation for African American art history. During the last fifty years, Driskell established the study of African American art as a legitimate, important, and distinct discipline. Morrison concludes that Driskell “seeks to reveal what is there rather than predefine what it should be.”³

Driskell, whose screenprint *Dancing Angel* (2002) is in this exhibition, seeks to depict reality as he sees it through the eyes of an artist. What do he, Emma Amos, Elizabeth Catlett, and John Woodrow Wilson have in common in addition to their being among the inductees to the National Academy? What do Kerry James Marshall, Whitfield Lovell, Martin Puryear, and Kara Walker have in common in addition to being among the winners of the MacArthur Fellowship? And what is the commonality between Barkley L. Hendricks, Dawoud Bey, and Martin Puryear in addition to all of them being alumni of Yale University? All of these artists are included in the Gallery's permanent collection, as well as in *Embodied: Black Identities in American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery*.

While many of the artists represented in this exhibition have earned official recognition, they all exemplify the pinnacle of artistic creativity, craftsmanship, and originality. These artists build upon and push the medium of their choice to new heights. Romare Bearden, for example, used the medium of collage, developed and often used by such artists as Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, in a unique and innovative way. Sam Gilliam, who started his career during the 1960s as a Color Field painter, was among the first artists to remove the canvas from its frame, creating his classic drapery paintings, thus blurring the borders between painting, sculpture, and installation. Driskell, often recognized as a master colorist for the richness of his palette, utilizes several mediums—from painting to print-making to mixed media—to explore themes such as Africa and religion and genres such as landscape and self-portrait. The celebrated sculptor Martin Puryear is represented in this exhibition by a set of woodcuts; he also creates large-scale sculptures made of wire, steel, stone, and wood. Other artists in *Embodied*, such as Barkley L. Hendricks, Whitfield Lovell, and Kerry James Marshall, reinvigorate the genre of figuration and bring new dimensions to contemporary painting and installation.

Finally, what is also common among these artists is that they, like other artists, strive to project their interpretation of life and expression of beauty through their art. As Driskell has often mentioned, the notion of a “black aesthetic,” which was common during the 1960s, is now being challenged.⁴ What African American artists have been doing is not much different than what other artists—including visual artists, musicians, dancers, and so forth—have been doing for generations: they all draw from their own experiences. Kevin E. Cole, for example, uses the necktie shape in *Notes from an African Proverb “Wisdom”* (1993) to create art that makes reference to life in the corporate world, as well as to the lynching of African American men on their return from voting in rural Georgia, as described to him by his grandfather. Kara Walker also addresses complicated themes, such as power and control, race and sexuality, as seen in *Cotton; Li'l Patch of Woods; Disappearing Act*; and *Untitled (John Brown)* (1996–97). Though these works address difficult subject matters, their essence is beauty, regardless of the style, medium, or ideology expressed. The Gallery’s collection of African American art and the exhibition *Embodied* are, therefore, a celebration of the beauty in art as well as of the contribution of outstanding African American artists to the field of American art.

In a conversation I had with Richard M. Danziger, one of the Gallery’s board members, about this exhibition, we discussed some of the issues that the exhibition might address—issues that are at the heart of any endeavor to expose audiences to African American art. What, for example, distinguishes African American art as a body of work in and of itself? How do ideas about content, authorship, or ethnicity help us form such distinctions? It is my hope that *Embodied* will answer these questions, but more so, that it will initiate a dialogue that is well worth having.

Notes

1. Jock Reynolds, "Director's Foreword," in Helen Cooper et al., *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness: American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery*, exh. cat. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Art Gallery, 2008), xi.
2. Keith Morrison, "Foreword," in Julie L. McGee, *David C. Driskell: Artist and Scholar* (Petaluma, Calif.: Pomegranate Communications, Inc., 2006), 7.
3. Ibid., 9.
4. David C. Driskell, lecture presented at the Cosmos Club, Washington, D.C., April 6, 2010.

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Drawing from its growing collection of works by African American artists, the Yale University Art Gallery presents an exhibition conscious of the myriad ways in which artists negotiate black and African diasporic narratives. Seeking to challenge the geopolitical ideologies of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality placed upon bodies, *Embodied: Black Identities in American Art from the Yale University Art Gallery* questions the assumptive aspects of race and revels in the multiplicity of identities that artists and art objects self-assert.

Embodied, a student-curated exhibition collaboratively organized between the Yale University Art Gallery and the David C. Driskell Center at the University of Maryland, explores the relationship between the body and identity through art in a rich variety of media. The works in the exhibition are grouped into three sections, each with a particular focus: the performance of race through art and artifice; the absent or dematerialized body, and how that absence comments upon identity; and displacement and its effect on shared histories, cultural geography, and national identity. Each of these three sections highlights one work that serves as a point of departure for understanding the concept in question. The highlighted works are, respectively, Kerry James Marshall's untitled painting (2009), Lorna Simpson's *Wigs (Portfolio)* (1994), and Barkley L. Hendricks's *APB's (Afro-Parisian Brothers)* (1978). Consisting exclusively of works in the Yale University Art Gallery collection, the exhibition also invites reflection on the Gallery as a "collecting body" with an educational mission.

Underlying the discussion of the racialized body is the question of how—or whether—to categorize art created, or inspired, by African Americans. The works chosen by the student curators prompt the viewer to question the categories of "African American" and "black." *Embodied* follows and builds on a number of important exhibitions that have taken "black art" as their subject. By asking whether "black art" ever existed to begin with, *Embodied* redirects the critical discourse and encourages its audience to reexamine some basic assumptions. —HB

Embodying Art and Artifice

Artists manifest aesthetic objects in the space and time continuum of the real world. They rely not only on their psyches, the immaterial force that sparks their creativity, but also on their physical bodies, with which they labor to give their visual ideas concrete form. Like all of us, they enact, on a daily basis, richly textured public and private performances that constitute—through repetition and over time—various identities, including gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexual orientation. This section of the exhibition examines the productive intersection of embodiment with art and artifice. A recent acquisition, Kerry James Marshall's untitled painting from 2009, foregrounds these conceptual concerns.

Through compositional and thematic choices in this work, Marshall betrays his intimate knowledge of the history of Western art. With its hieratically centralized artist at work, the painting participates in the long tradition of images about image making found in such well-known examples as Diego Velázquez's *Las meninas* (1656) or Johannes Vermeer's *Allegory of Painting* (ca. 1666–67). In Marshall's painting, a stately, poised figure, disturbed during an act of self-portrayal, turns to meet the viewer in the space of a darkened studio. Brushes, a wooden easel, and an oversized palette (the shape of which suggests the continent of Africa) all signify the undeniable presence of creative genius. Marshall accentuates this reading by providing the protagonist with an exaggerated, beretlike topknot. Gestural marks, scrapes, and daubs, indices of past interventions by the artist, hover in the ambiguous space between the real and fictive surfaces of the painting.

The stagelike setting of this picture and the self-conscious pose of the figure draw attention to Marshall's ongoing investigations into the mechanics of world making. The direct gaze of the interrupted artist activates a dramatic confrontation with the viewer. A lone fingernail on the subject's left hand in red, black, and green—the colors of the Pan-African flag—announces her political affiliations and emotional investments. Fleshed out with pigment straight from the tube for skin tone, the protagonist in this “black-face” tableau plays up the performance of race, a social construction that Marshall implies is only “skin deep.” Such an instability then calls



Kerry James Marshall

American, born 1955

Untitled, 2009

Acrylic on PVC, 61 $\frac{1}{8}$ \times 72 $\frac{7}{8}$ \times
3 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (155.3 \times 185.1 \times 9.8 cm)

Purchased with the Janet and
Simeon Braguin Fund and a gift
from Jacqueline L. Bradley,
B.A. 1979, 2009.161.1

gender into question, too: Is this a woman? Or a clean-shaven man masquerading in a fancy dress, wig, and jewelry? Marshall augments this work's in-your-face quality by painting the picture on a support so thick that it imposes itself upon the personal space of the viewer. That Marshall created the image in acrylic paint on durable PVC—both synthetic materials—only underscores the highly “artificial” character of this literally and figuratively multilayered image. —JFW

Romare Howard Bearden

American, 1911–1988

Village of Yo, 1964

Collage, sheet 9 × 12¼ in.

(22.9 × 31.1 cm)

Leonard C. Hanna, Jr.,

B.A. 1913, Fund, 2000.28.1

In addition to having varied intellectual interests, Romare Howard Bearden had diverse artistic ones. The artist experimented with various media and styles, but he is probably best known for his unique collages. *Village of Yo* is a socially and politically minded collage that relates to the events in the United States during the Civil Rights era. For Bearden, the African American experience is built upon a foundation of both Africa and Europe: the artist juxtaposes abstract human heads, which reflect the influence of Cubism and African masks, with the crenellations and arches of European architecture, seen in the structures in the lower right and upper left. Combined, these images illustrate how African and European history have worked together to shape the African American experience. —LH



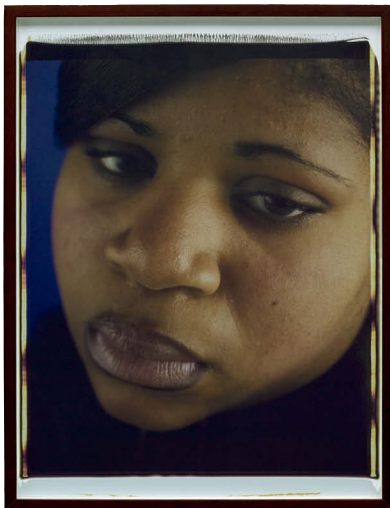
Dawoud Bey

American, born 1953, M.F.A. 1993

Joy, 1999

**Triptych; instant color prints,
each 29 × 66 in. (73.7 × 167.6 cm)
Gift of Janet and Simeon
Braguin, 1999.73.2.1–3**

Dawoud Bey is a prolific photographer from the Jamaica, Queens, neighborhood of New York City. In 1999 Bey photographed this work's namesake, Joy, a student from New Haven, who has blue-polished nails and boldly outlined lips, and wears gold hoop earrings. Although not a full-length portrait, Bey conveys a wealth of visual information about Joy through her gaze, gesture, and accessories. Bey has honored several other high-school students from New Haven with a photographic portrait—a tradition that is not typically reserved for young people of color. —sk

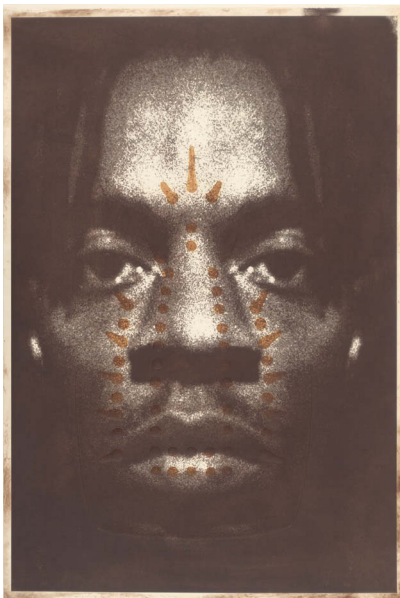


Willie Cole

American, born 1955

Man, Spirit, and Mask, 1999
Triptych; *Man*: photo-
etching and embossing
with hand additions; *Spirit*:
screenprint with lemon juice
and scorching; *Mask*: photo-
etching and woodcut, each 39¼
× 26½ in. (99.4 × 67.3 cm)
A. Conger Goodyear, B.A. 1899,
Fund, 2000.82.1.1-3

This triptych by Willie Cole features images of a flatiron that the artist discovered in 1988 on the streets of Newark, New Jersey, and which subsequently became a recurring motif in his work. *Man, Spirit, and Mask* engages Cole's identification with African, African American, and personal histories. One photo-etching depicts Cole's own face marked by the scorching iron, evoking traditions of ritual scarification and slave branding. With his depiction of a man, an ethereal mark of the flatiron, and a mask, Cole evokes the physical, spiritual, and performative modes of human existence. To incite what he calls a "spiritual transformation" in the viewer, he uses ordinary found objects and channels the meaning from the objects' past into the artist's and beholder's present. —LLS



David C. Driskell

American, born 1931

Dancing Angel, 2002

Screenprint, 28½ × 16¼ in.

(72.4 × 41.3 cm)

Gift of Jean and Robert E.

Steele, M.P.H. 1971, M.S. 1974,

PH.D. 1975, 2004.90.2

In many of his paintings and prints, David C. Driskell uses color to express passion and spirituality in abstract renderings of the human body. The screenprint *Dancing Angel* displays not only Driskell's enthusiasm for color but also the artist's interest in texture and mark making. The work possesses an especially tactile quality that is difficult to accomplish in the characteristically flat print medium. Driskell's mark making is not limited to his artwork, however; as a curator, collector, and professor of art, Driskell has made an indelible mark on African American art history. —sk



Sam Gilliam

American, born 1933

***Haystack*, 1972**

Acrylic on canvas, 75 × 75 in.
(190.5 × 190.5 cm)

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel
Fendrick in appreciation for
the Yale education of their
children, 1982.115

Traces of the act of painting reside in the many pours, folds, and splatters that cover the surface of the fabric of this work. The painting occupies a transitional moment within Sam Gilliam's career, a period when he produced both stretched canvases, like *Haystack*, as well as draped and/or suspended ones. Here, the thick, beveled edge of the support emphatically projects the painting off the wall, provoking a primal, physical reaction in the viewer. —JFW



Joseph Holston

American, born 1944

Man in Boat, 2006

Etching and aquatint,

17½ × 24 in. (44.5 × 61 cm)

Commissioned by the David C.

Driskell Center; printed with

Professor Curlee R. Holton at

the Experimental Printmaking

Institute, Lafayette College,

Easton, Pennsylvania

Gift of Jean and Robert E.

Steele, M.P.H. 1971, M.S. 1974,

PH.D. 1975, 2006.12.2

Joseph Holston's *Man in Boat* reflects the artist's cubist-
abstractionist style and his interest in bold color. The abstracted
head of the figure turns away from the viewer in this introspective
print. His face is unspecified, allowing the viewer to project his or
her own image into the work. Holston does not reveal the full narra-
tive of the scene, instead showing an isolated moment that suggests
a larger story, thus inviting the viewer to engage further with the
image. —LH

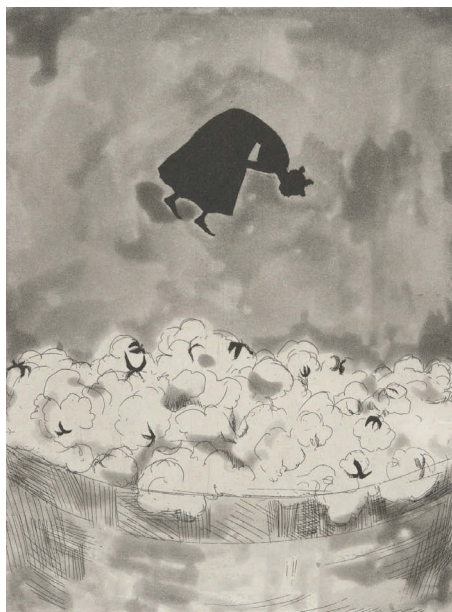


Kara Walker

American, born 1969

Clockwise, from top left:
Cotton; *Li'l Patch of Woods*;
Vanishing Act; and *Untitled*
(*John Brown*), 1996–97
Etchings, some with aquatint,
on chine collé, each 11¼ ×
8⅞ in. (29.8 × 22.5 cm)
A. Conger Goodyear, B.A. 1899,
Fund, 1997.81.2.1–.4

This print suite by Kara Walker, the scenes of which are set on a slave plantation in the antebellum South, employs the traditional technique of etching to engage and challenge romanticized notions of American history. Walker draws upon stereotypical racialized images such as the minstrel show (in *Vanishing Act*), the Negress/slave mistress (in *Cotton* and *Untitled [John Brown]*), and the oversexualized black child (in *Li'l Patch of Woods*), and deliberately evokes the grotesque by heightening awareness of the body within violent, exhibitionist, and sexualized contexts. In doing so, Walker modifies the slave narrative and retells it as a fantastical narrative to reveal both its foundation and its imaginative endurance in popular consciousness. —LLS



John Woodrow Wilson

American, born 1922

Escapee, 1969

Pastel, 35 × 45 in.

(88.9 × 114.3 cm)

Janet and Simeon Braguin

Fund, 2007.151.2

Opposite:

Urbanites, 1970

Lithograph, sheet 19¾ × 23 in.

(50.2 × 58.4 cm)

Janet and Simeon Braguin

Fund, 2007.151.3

Escapees, 1970

Lithograph, sheet 15 × 22 in.

(38.1 × 55.9 cm)

Janet and Simeon Braguin

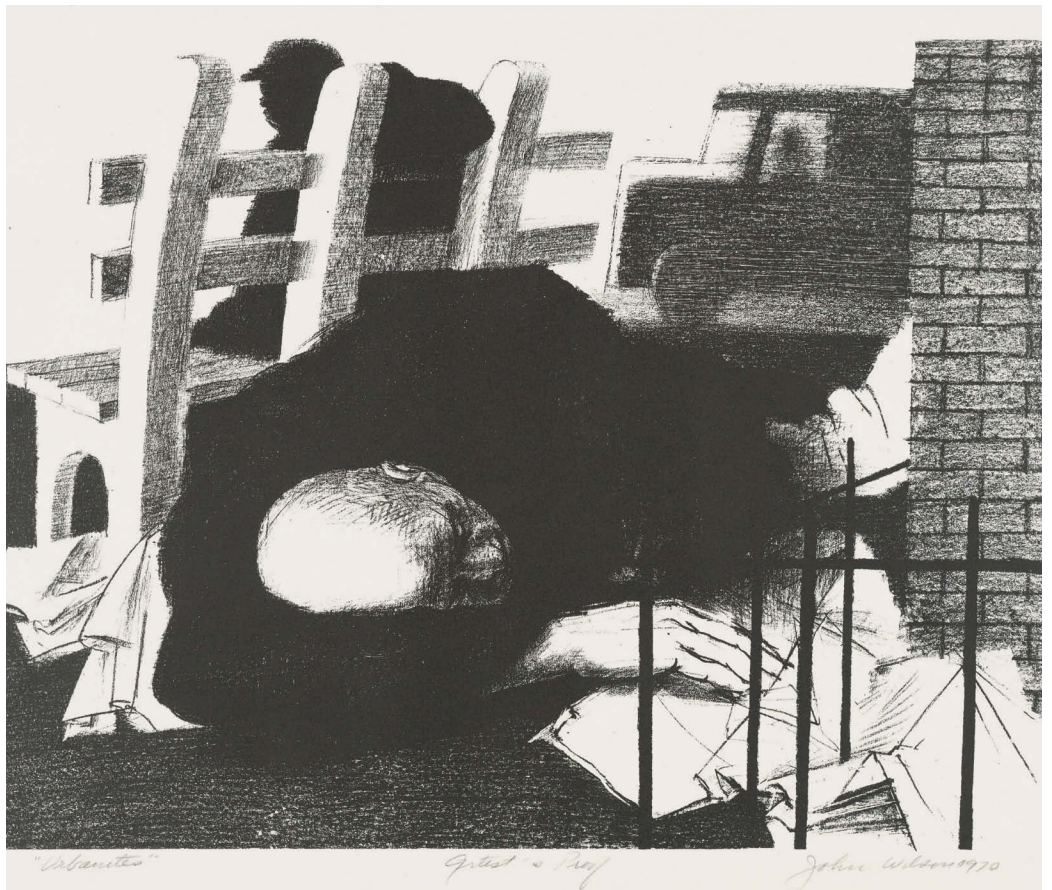
Fund, 2007.151.4

Exhibited only at the

Yale University Art Gallery

John Woodrow Wilson's works on paper during the 1970s and 1980s depict family members and Boston street scenes. An art professor at Boston University for more than forty years, his drawings serve as academic studies of form and light; their stillness and lack of bright colors allow the viewer to focus on the inner being of the subject. Wilson's portraits of the marginalized are both visually naturalistic and subtle, conveying how both the subject's internal energy and the artist's emotions are vital to the framing of a composition. —HB





James Van Der Zee

American, 1886–1983

Male Musical Trio, 1938

Gelatin silver print, sheet

7 × 9 in. (17.8 × 22.9 cm)

Gift of Lawrence S. Levine,

LL.B. 1958, 2003.139.1

Opposite:

Dancer, 1925

Gelatin silver print, sheet

6 5/8 × 4 3/4 in. (16.9 × 12 cm)

Gift of Richard and Barbara

Benson, 2001.115.17

Exhibited only at the
Driskell Center

James Van Der Zee is well known for his photographs of black New Yorkers during the Harlem Renaissance. The artist photographed people not only as they were, but also how they wanted to be portrayed. Van Der Zee's photographs from the early twentieth century represent a new period of positively depicting the African American community. For *Male Musical Trio* and *Dancer*, the artist photographed his subjects in clothing representative of their profession. Van Der Zee's portraits take on a theatrical quality as a result of the inclusion of props and themed backdrops. In addition, the artist did not hesitate to touch up photographs after taking them—for instance, adjusting his printing technique to make a lighter photograph with a livelier effect. These artistic choices demonstrate that the artist was interested in idealizing his subjects, portraying them in the best possible manner. —LH



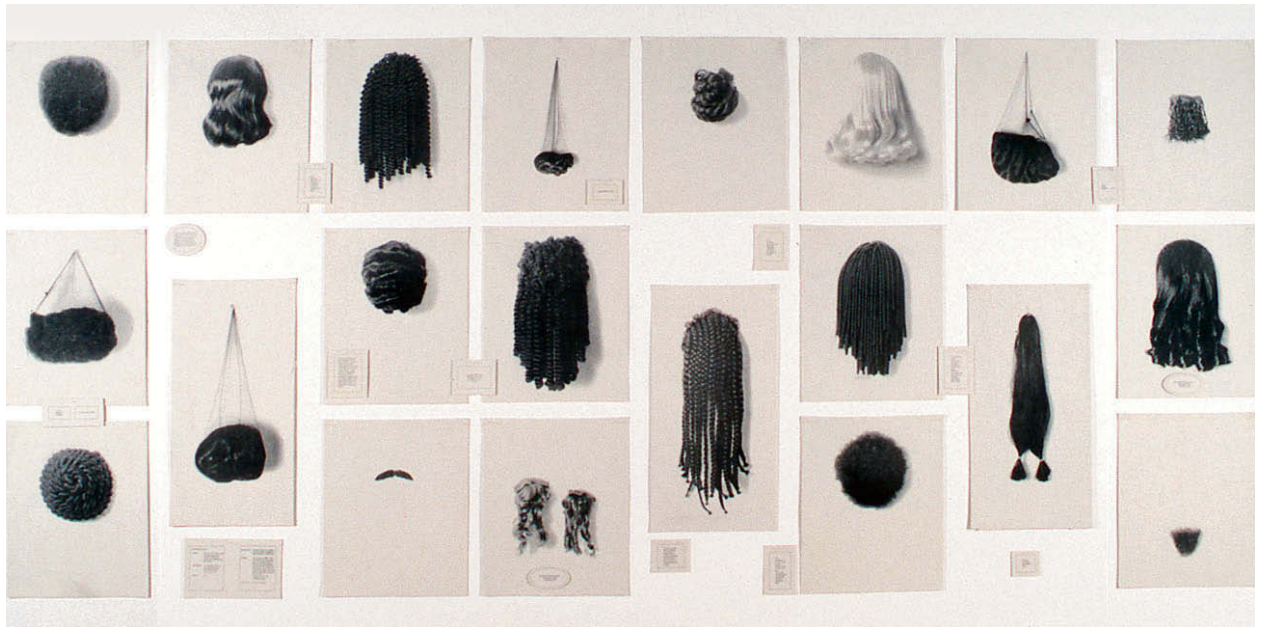


The Absent Body

Material and performative attributes of the human body together conventionally inform both individual and social classifications of identity. This section of the exhibition, organized around Lorna Simpson's photo-text installation *Wigs (Portfolio)* (1994), locates the body as its prime subject precisely through the body's material absence. This removal of the visible body invites reflection on the cultural assumptions and power dynamics that influence our social conceptions of identity. In the absence of what many consider physical indicators of race, gender, and sexual orientation, this section explores the ambiguity of the dematerialized body.

Wigs consists of photographs of a stylistic range of vacant wigs accompanied by seventeen text passages, all printed as lithographs on felt. The wigs in the lithographs are oriented away from the viewer, thus effacing the subject(s) that might wear them. Consequently, the wigs themselves become the sole marker by which a viewer can hypothesize the physical, racial, and sexual identity of the anonymous body. By removing the body, Simpson prompts the viewer to recognize the cultural assumptions implicit in the viewing of various hairstyles, such as those that are braided or woven, as characteristically African American. In an essay for the catalogue of the Museum of Modern Art exhibition *MoMA 2000: Open Ends (1960–2000)*, Simpson wrote, “[T]he wigs act as a surrogate for talking about the body or speaking about the presence of a person in the work. The wearer of the wigs can either become someone else or become closer to the person that one sees oneself to be in terms of either embracing or cutting across a particular stereotype.”

Traditionally associated, together with costumes, as a vehicle of transformation and metamorphosis, wigs symbolize an act of self-fashioning and self-representation. Printed life-size on felt by means of waterless lithography, Simpson's images of wigs retain the lush texture and substantial weight of real hair, fulfilling the viewer's visual and tactile sensory expectations. Thus, the piece positions the black woman in a dual role as both producer and site of voyeuristic sexuality. Simpson's witty inclusion of a merkin (a pubic wig) at the bottom right corner reiterates the function of the wigs in the context of sexuality and desire. Similarly, the lithograph of the moustache at the



Lorna Simpson

American, born 1960

Wigs (Portfolio), 1994

Waterless lithographs on felt,
overall 72 × 162 in.

(182.9 × 411.5 cm)

Katharine Ordway Fund,
2000.30.1.1-.21

bottom left introduces an ambiguously masculine presence into a traditionally female aesthetic space.

The seventeen text fragments that surround, overlap, and inhabit the lithographs deliberately confuse the traditional one-to-one relationship of text and image. The installation asks the viewer to formulate associations between the narrative passages and the various wigs according to the viewer's own assumptions and expectations, allowing for a range of possible social, political, and cultural meanings. The texts, accordingly, act as a vehicle for the viewer to resist or affirm the diverse meanings mapped onto the black female body. Two text passages—"strong desire to blur" and "strong desire to decipher"—succinctly reiterate the attempts of the artists in this section to conceal the physical body in order to reveal traditional narratives and associated social assumptions. —LLS

Jean-Michel Basquiat

American, 1960–1988

Untitled, 1981

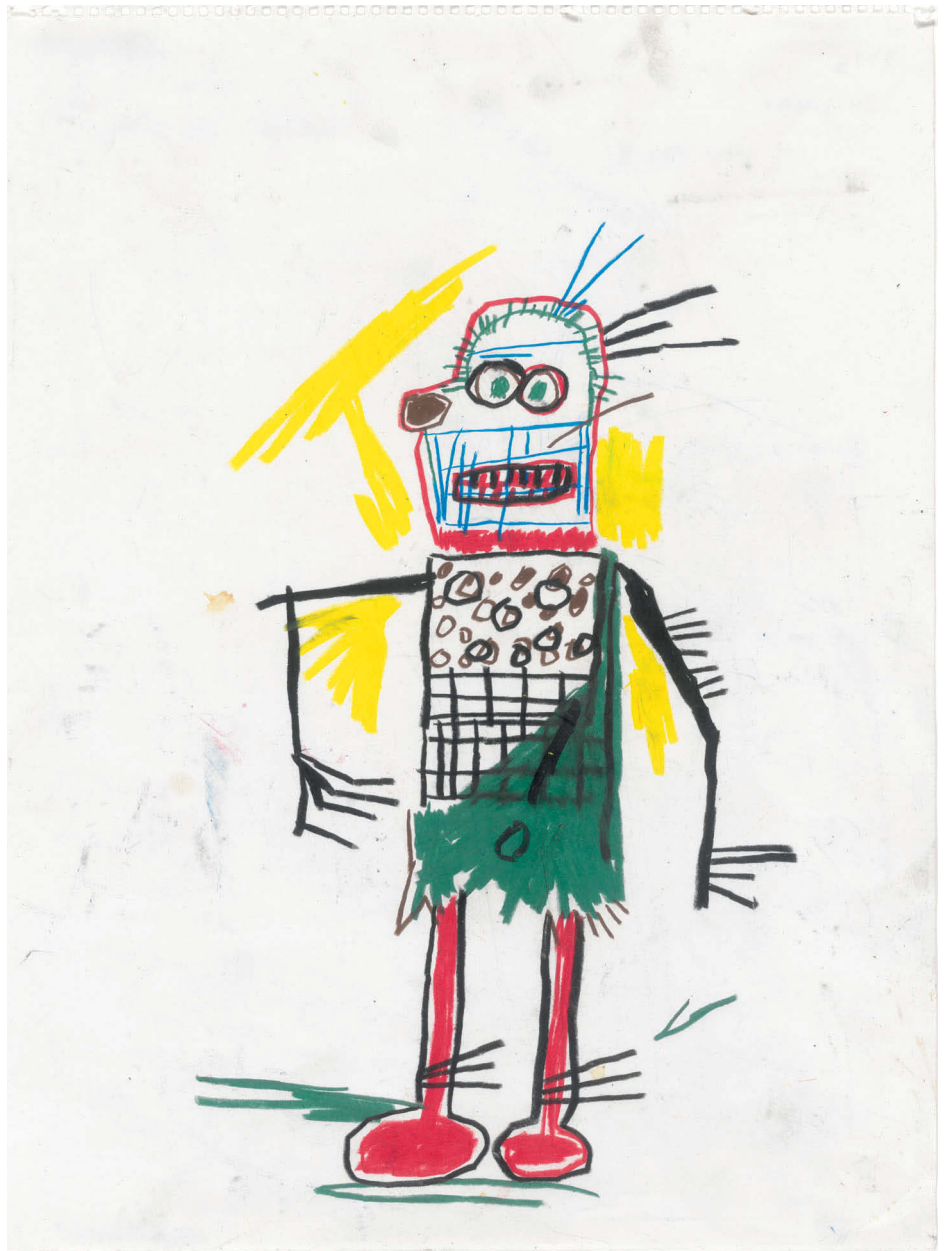
Oil stick, 15½ × 11¼ in.

(39.4 × 29.8 cm)

Richard Brown Baker, B.A. 1935,

Collection, 2008.19.918

Though Jean-Michel Basquiat famously referenced his childhood copy of *Gray's Anatomy* in many images during his brief career, this early sheet instead portrays the decidedly nonhuman body of a late twentieth-century mechanomorph. The cyborg's amalgamated figure—with green toga, protective helmet, and gesticulating arms—speaks to the artist's own mixed cultural heritage: Basquiat grew up in Brooklyn, the son of a French-speaking Haitian father and a Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican mother. The artist's choice of thick, oil-based crayons enhances the awkward, yet self-conscious, graffiti-based style of this bravura drawing. —JFW



Kevin E. Cole

American, born 1960

Notes from an African Proverb

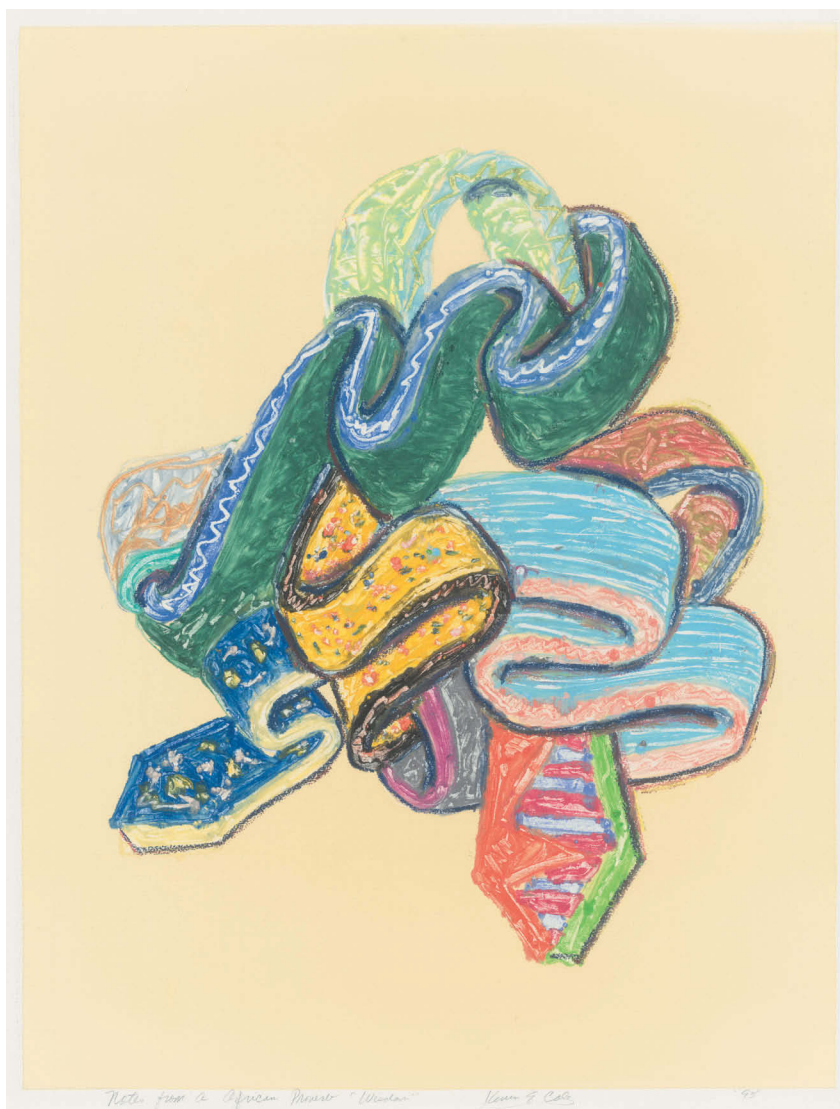
"Wisdom," 1993

Monotype, sheet 34¼ × 28 in.
(87 × 71.1 cm)

Gift of Jean and Robert E.

Steele, M.P.H. 1971, M.S. 1974,
P.H.D. 1975, 2004.90.1

Kevin E. Cole is best known for his works on paper depicting neckties. In *Notes from an African Proverb "Wisdom,"* Cole depicts a knot of ties that appear more like snakes than men's clothing accessories. Cole's image speaks to racism in nineteenth-century America, specifically recalling how African Americans were often lynched by their neckties on their way to the voting booth. Although these neckties are brightly colored with zigzag and stripe patterns, they serve as a darker icon of racial violence and oppression in American history. —sk



Henry Gudgell

American, 1826–1895

Cane

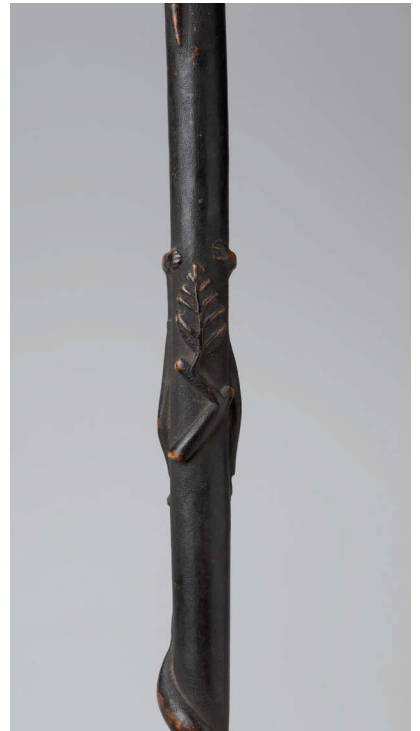
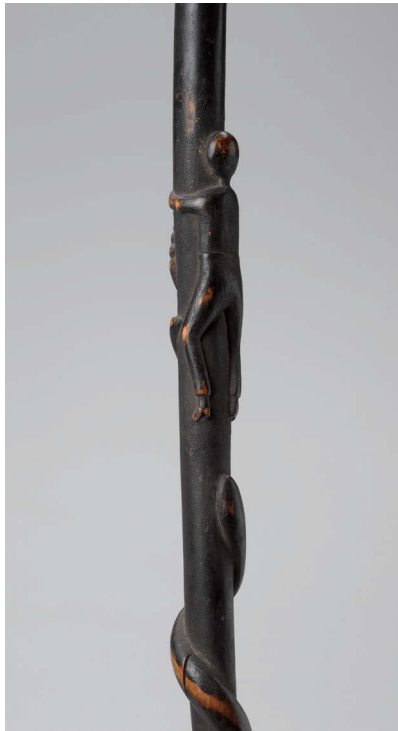
Livingston County, Missouri,
ca. 1867

Ebonized wood, H. 37 ×

DIAM. 1½ in. (94 × 3.8 cm)

Director's Purchase Fund,
1968.23

Henry Gudgell, a former slave from Kentucky, carved this cane for John Bryant, a Civil War veteran who had sustained a leg wound. A lizard and tortoise—common motifs in the Afro-Georgian carving tradition of this time—appear below the geometric designs embedded around the handle. An animated man embraces the shaft; on the opposite side, a leaf sprouts from a forked branch that mirrors the angle of the figure's knees. A serpent entwines the bottom of the cane, echoing the patterns found around the handle. The cane is similar in design to African Kongo chiefly staffs, and the serpent and lizard are powerful healing emblems in Kongo cosmology. As a bodily support, the cane symbolizes the transportation of African heritage brought across the Atlantic. —AAK



Felrath Hines

American, 1913–1993

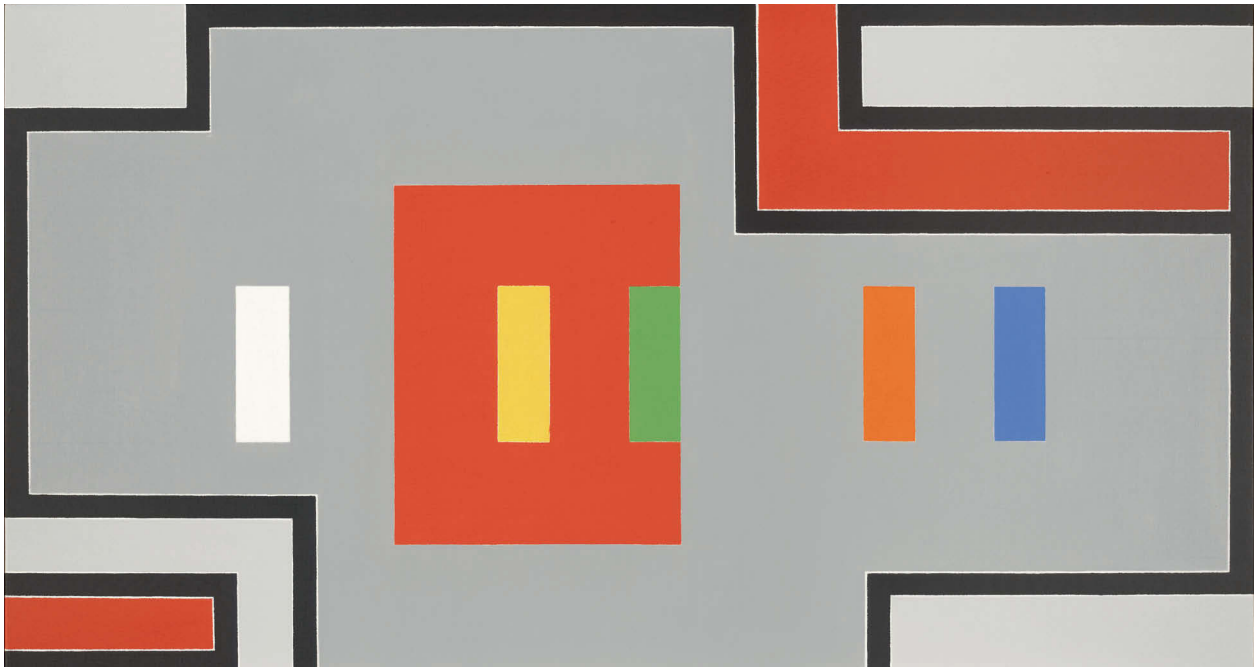
Piano-Forte, 1988

Oil on linen, 26 × 48 in.

(66 × 121.9 cm)

Gift of the wife of the artist,
2009.84.2

This work by Felrath Hines extends the formal concerns of mid-twentieth-century geometric imagery, like Josef Albers's *Homage to the Square* exercises. A founding member of the 1960s collective Spiral, Hines later resisted inclusion in the Whitney Museum of American Art's 1971 exhibition *Contemporary Black Artists in America*, refusing to be categorized solely as a "black artist." In *Piano-Forte*, Hines suppresses the human figure, crafting the surface of the painting in an emotionally "cool" and distant style, and producing "sound" through visual (not aural) means. —JFW



Whitfield Lovell

American, born 1959

Ode, 1999

Mixed media, overall 117 × 72 × 59 in. (297.2 × 182.9 × 149.9 cm)

Katharine Ordway Fund,
2000.56.1a-c

Situated around a charcoal drawing on wood of a well-dressed young man, empty chairs articulate a sense of absence in Whitfield Lovell's *Ode*. Using photography, ephemera, and disused objects, Lovell gives material substance to the lives of black Americans obscured by history. To conjure forth these histories, *Ode* creates an altarlike space that draws the viewer into the work. With wooden planks, peeling cloth chairs, and charcoal streaks, Lovell offers up a lingering, mythical past through the marks of its remains: ghostly bodies and discarded objects, coaxed back to life through our own sensory experience. —AAK



Julie Mehretu

American, born Ethiopia 1970

Circulation, from the suite
Heavy Weather, 2005
Color hard-ground etching
with aquatint and engraving
on Gampi paper chine collé,
image 27¼ × 39¾ in.
(70.5 × 101 cm)
Richard Brown Baker, B.A. 1935,
Fund, 2008.2.1

This large, virtuosic intaglio belongs to a suite of three prints entitled *Heavy Weather*, which the artist completed in response to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. A virtual compendium of mark making with many squiggles, scores, and dashes, the image serves as a metaphor for the movement of bodies—including planets, humans, and particles—through time and across space. The title, *Circulation*, conflates the ebb and flow of global weather systems with the exchange and distribution of art-world print culture to make a witty, self-referential pun. —JFW



Howardena Doreen Pindell

American, born 1943, M.F.A. 1967

Kyoto: Positive/Negative, 1980
Etching and lithograph, sheet
26 $\frac{3}{16}$ × 20 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (66.8 × 51.8 cm)
The National Endowment for
the Arts and the Susan Morse
Hilles Matching Fund, 1981.17.2

In comparison to her recent work, Howardena Doreen Pindell's mixed-media pieces from the 1970s and 1980s are markedly more abstract. *Kyoto: Positive/Negative* is an early lithograph divided into a grid of five registers, framed by a thick, red border. Throughout the print, playful and improvisational designs dance in and out of the grid and border. These energetic designs, which resemble scars, scratches, and bumps, add to the skinlike surface of the print. In reducing her canvas to these basic marks, Pindell has created a tactile and corporeal work. —sk



Martin Puryear

American, born 1941,
M.F.A. 1971, HON. 1994

Cane

Published by Arion Press, San Francisco, 2000; text by Jean Toomer

Deluxe edition book with woodcut illustrations, bound in goatskin, in wooden slipcase, 11¼ × 14¼ in.

(29.8 × 35.9 cm) (closed)

Purchased with a gift from Anna Marie and Robert F.

Shapiro, B.A. 1956, 2001.5.1

Opposite:

Cane, with woodcut *Karintha*

Published by Arion Press, San Francisco, 2000; text by Jean Toomer

Book with woodcut illustrations, bound in linen,

11¼ × 14 in. (29.8 × 35.6 cm)

(closed)

Janet and Simeon Braguin

Fund, 2001.39.1

Following page, clockwise from top left:

Karintha (not illustrated); *Becky*;

Carma; *Fern*; *Esther*; *Avey*; and

Bona, for the book *Cane*, 2000

Woodcuts on handmade

Kitakata paper, each 16⅞ ×

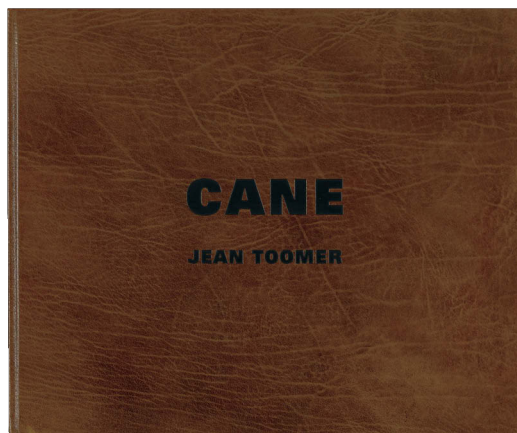
20⅜ in. (42.9 × 51.8 cm)

Purchased with a gift from

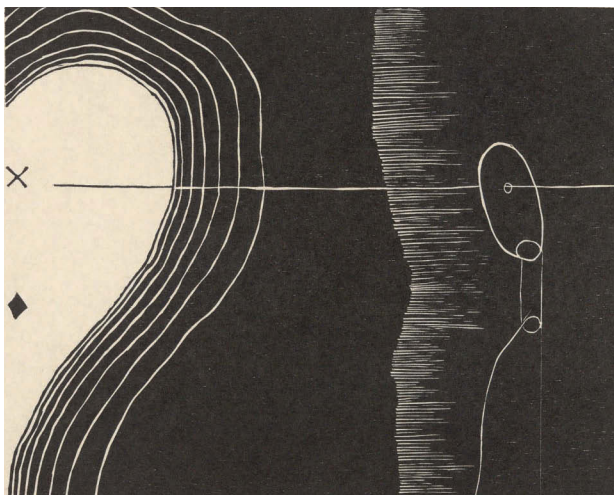
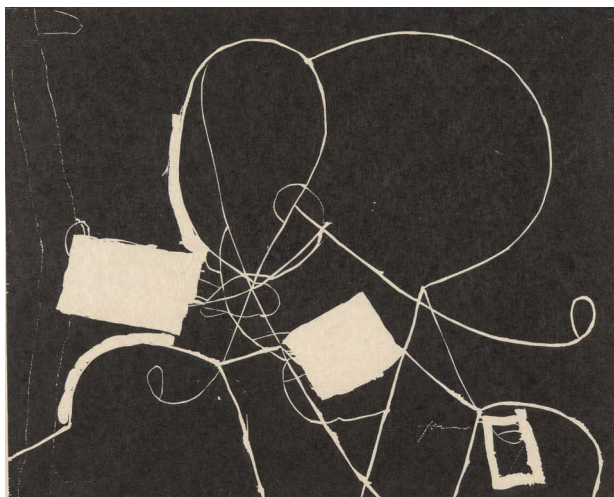
Anna Marie and Robert F.

Shapiro, B.A. 1956, 2001.5.2.1-7

Jean Toomer's 1923 experimental novel about Georgian agrarian folk culture and the rapid rise of American urbanization is a thematically unified amalgam of poetry, drama, and narrative prose. In 2000 Martin Puryear designed a set of seven woodblock prints to accompany Arion Press's deluxe edition of this prized product of the Harlem Renaissance. Named after different characters in Toomer's book, Puryear's prints represent abstract portraits of seven female figures. Both gestural as well as geometric, the portraits collapse visual distinctions between the abstract and the figurative in a way that mimics Toomer's narrative integration of poetry and prose. —LLS



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Vincent DaCosta Smith

American, 1929–2003

Amnesty, 1971

Etching, 6% × 8% in.

(17.5 × 22.6 cm)

Katharine Ordway Fund,
1990.66.3

In Vincent DaCosta Smith's *Amnesty*, twelve men crowd around a draped coffin. The central figure, flanked by a Muslim imam at far left and a Pan-Africanist at far right, touches the coffin in a gesture of both solidarity and forgiveness, pardoning the deceased for a life of revolutionary violence. The image of thirteen men, one of whom looks away, gathered around a table alludes to depictions of the Last Supper in Christian art. The ankh, an Egyptian symbol of life, around the central figure's neck and the moon and star on the coffin, juxtaposed with the reference to the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and death, memorialize the rise of the Nation of Islam in black urban communities as well as the pro-Islam, largely male Black Arts arm of the Black Power Movement, following the assassination of Malcolm X. —HB



Unknown Maker

Carved Cane

Cherry Valley, Arkansas,
ca. 1916

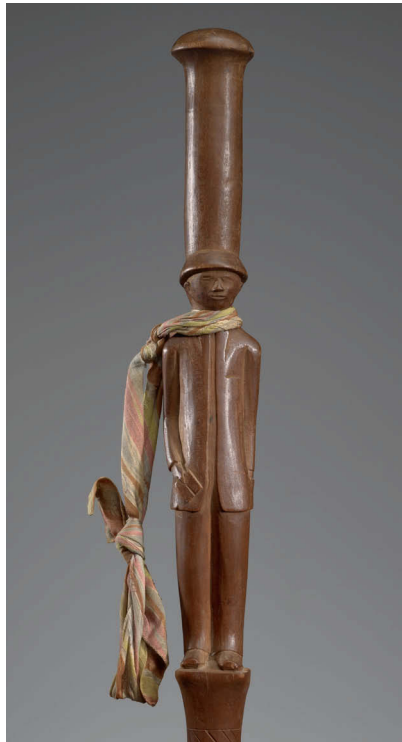
Wood with rhinestone inlay
and cloth, H. $36\frac{3}{4}$ × DIAM.

$1\frac{3}{4}$ in. (92.4 × 4.5 cm)

Leonard C. Hanna, Jr.,

B.A. 1913, Fund, 1999.68.1

Reputed to have been made in Cherry Valley, Arkansas, by an unknown carver, this cane displays a carved figure just below the handle, around which a remnant of ancestral cloth is wrapped. Along the shaft, an inlay of rhinestones is set into nodules as the cane spirals its way—maintaining the integrity of the original branch limb from which it was carved—to a smooth base. The rhinestones are inlaid where the sap would have risen through the branch to nourish the leaves. In its design, the cane exhibits characteristics similar to a Kongo figural charm, in which the wrapping of material and embedding of reflective objects signify a spiritual life force embedded within the charm itself. —AAK



Carrie Mae Weems

American, 1953

Congo, Ibo, Mandingo, Togo,
from the series *Slave Coast*, 1993
Triptych; gelatin silver
prints, each 20 × 20 in.
(50.8 × 50.8 cm)
Gift of Janet and Simeon
Braguin, 2000.86.5.1-3

In many of her photographs and films, Carrie Mae Weems picks apart the relationship between architecture, race, and power. Weems continues to dissect this topic in two photographs of views from the inside and outside of a fort where West African slaves were held before being forced onto ships traveling across the Atlantic Ocean. To the right of these two photographs, Weems provides the title of the work, *Congo, Ibo, Mandingo, Togo*, which describes four African ethnic groups that were heavily uprooted by the transatlantic slave trade. Though there is no evidence of slave bodies in these scenes, their experiences are palpable in the silent and vacant spaces depicted. —sk



Displaced Embodiment

The Pop art realism of Barkley L. Hendricks's portrait *APB's (Afro-Parisian Brothers)* (1978) anchors the questions—relating to geography, gender, displacement, and modes of display—explored in this section. *APB's* was composed from a photograph that Hendricks took during a visit to Paris in the 1970s. Against the sparse background of the canvas, two modern dandies embody the cosmopolitan coolness of seventies' black culture with their sartorial precision and provocative slickness. As art historian Richard J. Powell discussed in his recent book *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture*, the politically aesthetic catchphrase “Black is Beautiful” resounds in their suave tailoring, natural hairstyles, and defiant stance, a self-awareness that draws on histories of cultural nationalism, political activism, and a Pan-African consciousness associated with the era.

Look at these brothers in muted blue: with their suit jacket and fitted vests, open-collared shirts, well-adjusted trousers, belt buckle, ring, and necklace, Hendricks creates a surface of artifice, all expressed in a painterly exhibitionism with academic precedents reaching back to Caravaggio and Anthony van Dyck. Yet in their precise embellishments, these figures gesture toward their own “objecthood,” posing their identity through aesthetic means. Playfully creating a sense of flatness through the monochrome abstraction of the backdrop, Hendricks also evokes a psychological intensity—a sense of depth—in the surfeit of detail of these men's spectacularly displayed self-fashioning. In this movement between flatness and depth, Hendricks constructs the space for an imagined fraternal communality, marked by the self-conscious creation—and display—of shared histories, styles, and cultural geographies. Read in light of the work's title, which includes its own shorthand, these brothers—Hendricks included—assert a diasporic consciousness that in its hyperreal bravado also manages to question what black (masculine) identity could be globally, here in America or abroad. Moving between figuration and abstraction, translating identity across geography yet attending to the specificity of style, the dynamism of *APB's* pushes us to question the limits of what embodiment—as it relates to artists who share only the title “African American”—can mean. This dynamism reverberates throughout the works in this



Barkley L. Hendricks

American, born 1945, M.F.A. 1972
APB's (Afro-Parisian Brothers), 1978
Oil and acrylic on linen,
72 × 50 in. (182.9 × 127 cm)
Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund,
2005.31.1

section; their aesthetic concerns with form and media are also nuanced considerations of community and individuality, histories of diasporic black activism and the tensions of gender, display, and subject-hood.

APB's was created during the seventies' art-historical "moment," yet the questions it raises regarding the black (male) body as a site of intense negotiation remain relevant not only to the African American artists included here but also to artists from other parts of the black diaspora. The diasporic consciousness of *APB's* confronts, evokes, and questions the politics of nation, gender, and color, displayed here, now, in front of you. And, coolly confrontational, these brothers require a response. —AAK

Emma Amos

American, born 1938

*Emma Amos at
Elizabeth Catlett's, 2006*
Stencil with hand additions in
watercolor, colored pencil, and
crayon, sheet 14 3/4 × 15 in.
(37.5 × 38.1 cm) (irreg.)
Gift of Jean and Robert E.
Steele, M.P.H. 1971, M.S. 1974,
P.H.D. 1975, 2007.96.1

Emma Amos's work is largely autobiographical, but she also explores issues concerning politics, gender, race, and cultural history. In this work, created during her stay at the artist Elizabeth Catlett's Mexican home, Amos investigates how to depict her mixed heritage, using a contrast of light and shadow that may also reference ongoing social divisions in the twenty-first century. Amos's work is always filled with movement, which she creates here through vibrant colors, texture, and her use of line. —LH



David Bates

American, born 1952

***Katrina Portrait I*, 2006**

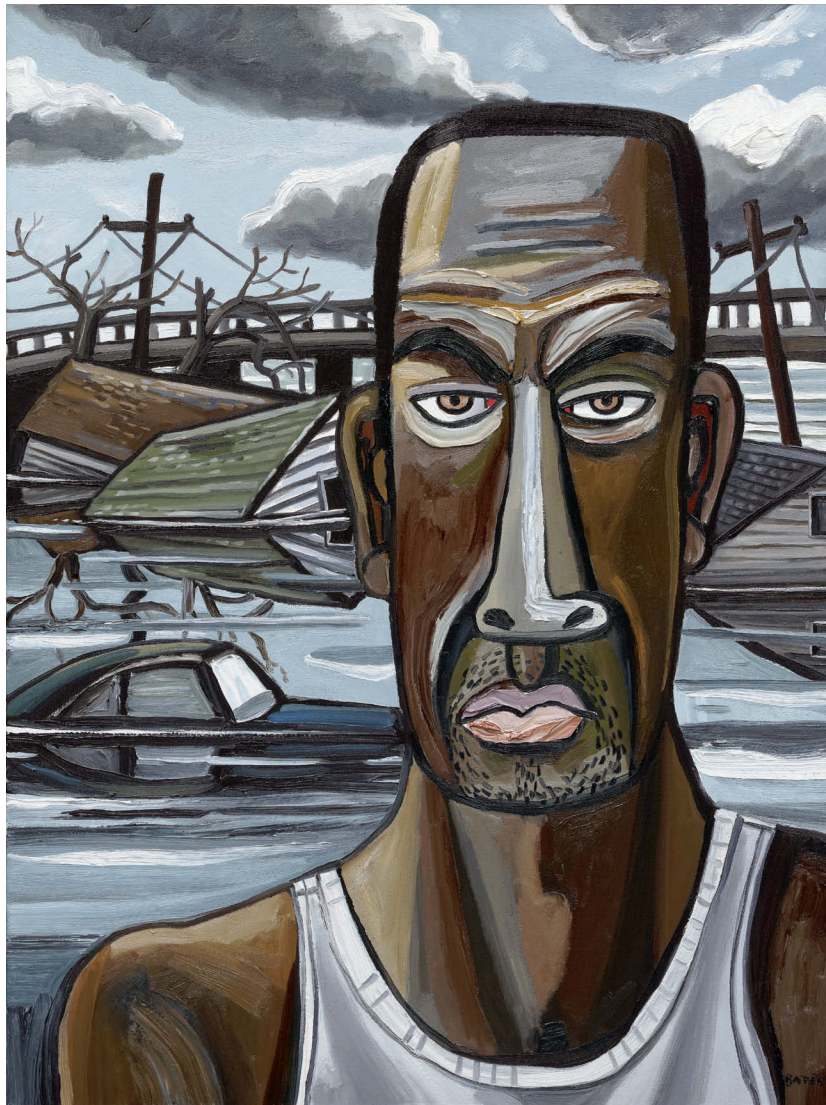
Oil on canvas, 48 × 36 in.

(121.9 × 91.4 cm)

Janet and Simeon Braguin

Fund, 2007.43.1

David Bates is known for his depictions of southern folk life along the Gulf Coast. This striking portrait is the first image in *The Storm*, a series of over sixty paintings of New Orleans residents in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina that served as studies for a large triptych painting of the same name. As the only white artist in this exhibition, Bates's inclusion compels the viewer to ask several questions: What is "black art"? Is Bates's race important to the image? The artist's decision to live and work in New Orleans after the hurricane, actively chronicling the plight of ordinary people finding catharsis in the everyday tasks of rebuilding their lives, speaks to his engagement with the black community he depicts. —HB



Elizabeth Catlett

American, active in Mexico,
born 1915

*My Role Has Been Important
in the Struggle to Organize the
Unorganized*, from the series
The Black Woman, 1947
Linocut, 10 × 14 1/4 in.
(25.4 × 35.9 cm)
Leonard C. Hanna, Jr., B.A.
1913, Fund, 1995.5.4

The eminent expatriate artist Elizabeth Catlett has spent much of her life working in Mexico while remaining active, though sometimes unwelcome, in American politics. This early print, made a year after Catlett's move to Mexico, exemplifies her commitment to creating images that speak to the culture of the working class. The prominence of hands and arms functions as a formal device to crop an intimate compositional space for the viewer, as well as a narrative device to represent physical gestures of self-declaration, confinement, and control. As such, the central outlined figure—possibly an autobiographical figuration of Catlett—is both ensconced within and liberated from the physical and social community. —LLS



Jacob Lawrence

American, 1917–2000

Hot Summer's Night, 1947
Pen and ink, 11 ½ × 16 ¾ in.
(29.2 × 42.6 cm)
Katharine Ordway Fund,
2000.46.1

One of three versions of the same scene, Jacob Lawrence's *Hot Summer's Night* depicts a cramped balcony that becomes a poignant rendering of the everyday and a commentary on the material conditions of black urban life. The balcony is tilted so that the flattened figures lean into one another within an abstracted, gridlike space, making the experience of tenement housing one of community, proximity, and connection. In creating this spatial intimacy between the figures, Lawrence connects the social body with the individual. Deriving its formal composition from social observation, this work exemplifies Lawrence's modern stylistic innovation. —AAK



Glenn Ligon

American, born 1960

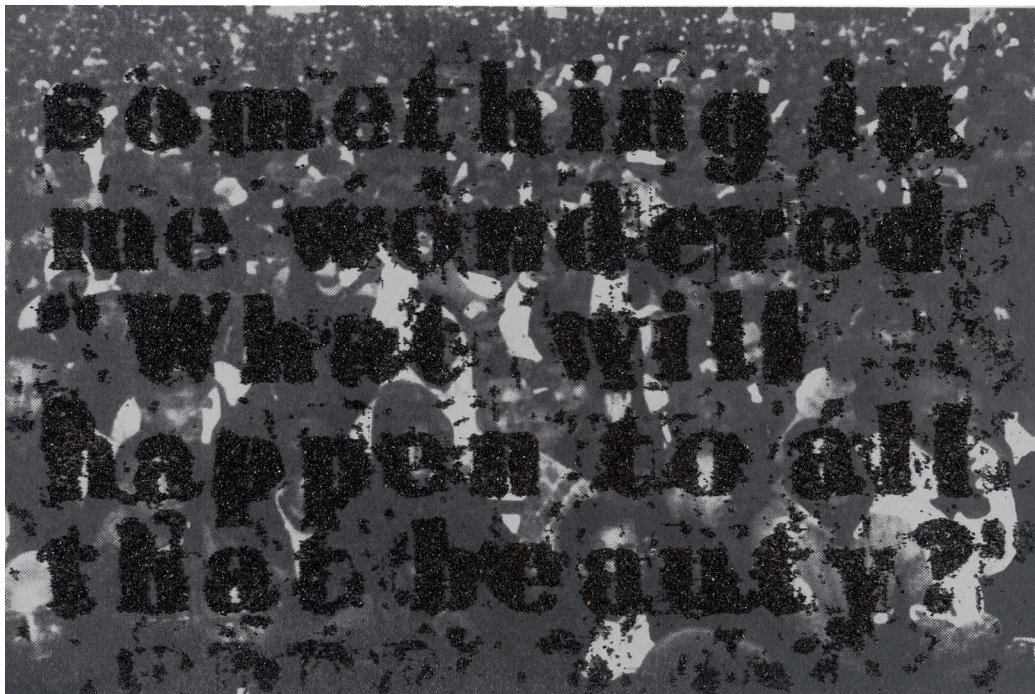
Untitled (Crowd/The Fire Next Time), 2000

Screenprint with coal crystals,
19¾ × 27¾ in. (50.2 × 70.5 cm)

Gift of Jean and Robert E.

Steele, M.P.H. 1971, M.S. 1974,
PH.D. 1975, 2005.90.1

This screenprint by Glenn Ligon depicts text excerpted from *The Fire Next Time*, a 1963 publication on race in America by the African American novelist James Baldwin, superimposed on an image of the crowd at the Million Man March, the 1995 social demonstration by black men held in Washington, D.C. Baldwin's text reads, "[S]omething in me wondered 'What will happen to all that beauty.'" Ligon stencils the powerful words in delicate coal dust, barely fixed and legible, partially obscuring the photograph of bodies. Ligon uses this visual ambiguity to comment on the exclusion of subgroups of African Americans—such as women and homosexuals—from the march and from the concerns of civil rights leaders in general. —LLS



Kerry James Marshall

American, born 1955

Memento, 1997

Lithograph, 30¼ × 44 in.

(76.8 × 111.8 cm)

Janet and Simeon Braguin

Fund, 2000.75.1

Kerry James Marshall's *Memento* memorializes the persons associated with the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. The work depicts multiple headshots of civic leaders and other individuals who died during this era, such as Medgar Evers and members of the Black Panther Party. Rather than drawing these images, Marshall uses the newspaper obituary photographs that the general public is accustomed to seeing. He exalts the fallen individuals by placing angel wings behind most of the images. A black woman carrying an urn of flowers stands before portraits of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and John F. Kennedy. The woman turns toward the viewer, asking us, and the larger community, to "mourn" with her. —LH



Michael B. Platt

American, born 1948

Hanaku, 2003

Charcoal, 67 × 48 in.

(170.2 × 121.9 cm)

Gift of Jean and Robert E.

Steele, M.P.H. 1971, M.S. 1974,

Ph.D. 1975, 2004.90.5

Exhibited only at the

Yale University Art Gallery

The word *hanaku* in the ancient Mesopotamian language of Akkadian means warrior—an interesting concept to attach to Saartjie Baartman, the Khoikhoi woman pictured here who was taken from South Africa and exhibited as a “freak” in nineteenth-century Europe. Michael B. Platt’s stunning composition places Baartman’s body in profile, highlighting the youthfulness of her smile and cheekbones and lending her legs a rooted, rather than sensual, strength. The ambiguities of the composition—the focus of her gaze and her environment—hint at larger uncertainties in the record of Baartman’s life. The thirty-three silver flowers at the bottom of the image may be meant to draw parallels between Baartman’s youth and Jesus’ age when he was betrayed and crucified. As Baartman’s body was dissected after her death, the pointed objects might also symbolize surgical equipment. —HB



Richard J. Powell

American, born 1953, M.A. 1982,
M.PHIL. 1984, PH.D. 1988

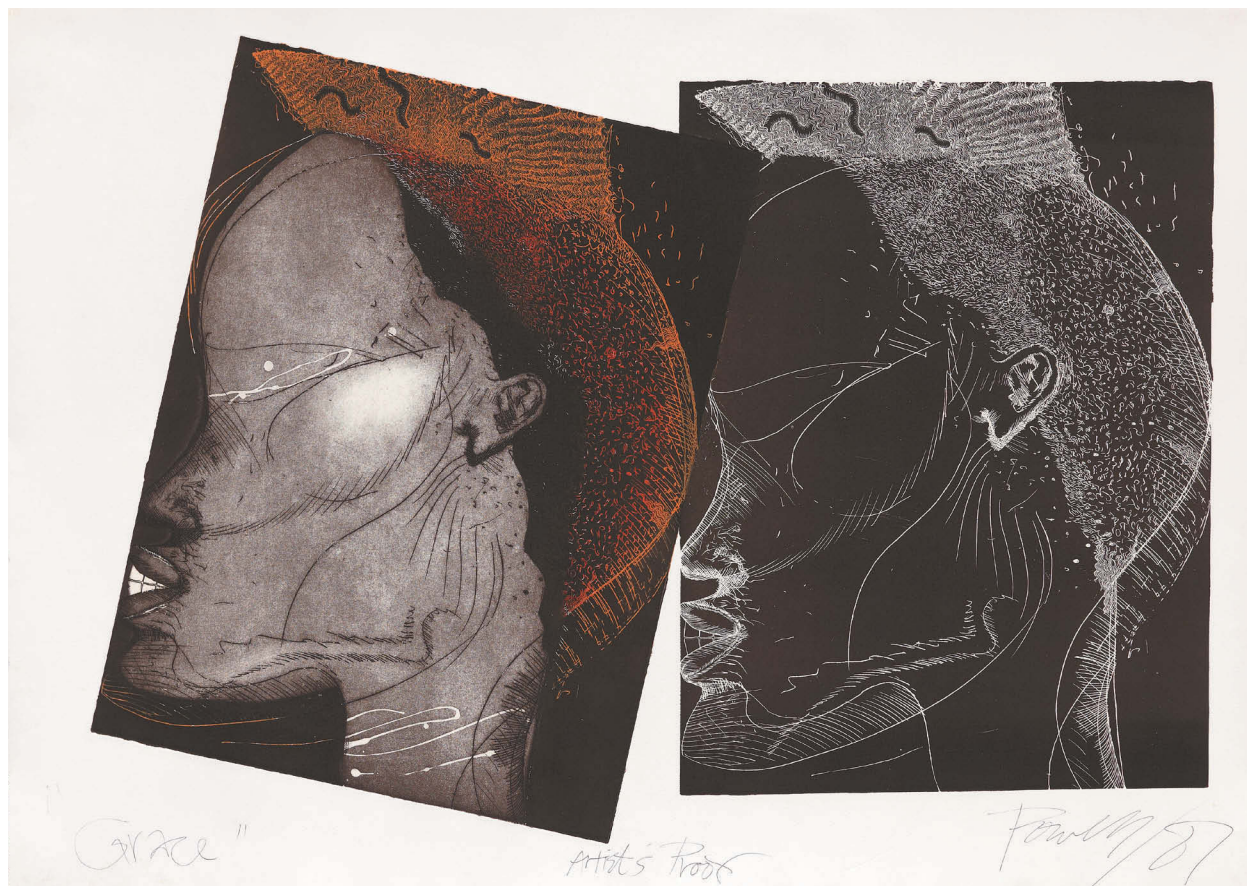
Grace, 1987

Etching and aquatint, sheet

29 3/4 × 41 3/4 in. (75.2 × 105.8 cm)

Gift of Teresa Grana, 2010.28.1

In this print, artist and art historian Richard J. Powell brings artistic modernism and celebrity culture together in a reconfiguration of traditional portraiture. The two profiles evoke the art forms of the early twentieth century, drawing on the modernists' fascination with African art, particularly Fang reliquary heads and masks from the Baule, Guro, and Dan peoples. In the angular severity of the figure's upright, closely cropped hair, the unmistakable image of Grace Jones—American model, singer, and celebrity—emerges. Through this convergence, Powell choreographs a dynamic mode of signification that simultaneously questions and celebrates the visual histories that shape African American cultural expression and its relationship to the discipline of art history. —AAK



Alison Saar

American, born 1956

Bat Boyz, 2001

**Baseball bats and pitch, 34 ×
12 × 12 in. (86.4 × 30.5 × 30.5 cm)
Janet and Simeon Braguin
Fund, 2001.101.1a-h**

Alison Saar's *Bat Boyz* is a collection of male portraits carved from eight wooden baseball bats. Although wooden in substance, these faces are not wooden in expression; they appear stern, unsmiling, and marked by furrowed brows. In Saar's choice of baseball bats as her medium, the artist implicitly addresses the role of blacks in America's favorite pastime—a sport that has a complicated history of both celebrating and rejecting black players. This hot-and-cold treatment of black players in baseball is reinforced by the haphazard positioning of the bats in Saar's work, with faces and bodies turned in different directions, evoking a feeling of displacement and disorientation. —SK



Vincent Alan W.

American, 1960–1996

Men at Work, from the
Transvestite Series, 1990
Gelatin silver print, 15½ × 10 in.
(39.4 × 25.4 cm)
The Allan Chasanoff, B.A.
1961, Photography Collection,
2004.130.220

Although his life was cut short at the age of thirty-six, Vincent Alan W.'s legacy lives on in his captivating photographs of queer communities from around the world. In *Men at Work*, the artist shows a close-up of a male cross-dresser leaning against a city street sign. Though a transvestite's body is often a site of controversy and contestation, the subject appears composed, quiet, and dignified, with dangling earrings, powdered makeup, and coiffed hair. Still, the subject seems guarded, with arms crossed over the stomach in a defensive pose—an attitude often exhibited by a minority not fully accepted into mainstream society. —SK



John Woodrow Wilson

American, born 1922

Study for *The Incident*, 1952

Watercolor, ink, and graphite,
squared for transfer, 17 ×

21¼ in. (43.2 × 54 cm)

Janet and Simeon Braguin

Fund, 2000.81.1

In 1950 John Woodrow Wilson became affiliated with the famed Esmeralda School of Painting and Sculpture in Mexico, studying fresco techniques with Diego Rivera and David Siqueiros. While a student, Wilson made the mural *The Incident*, along with its preliminary sketches and paintings such as this one. In this work, Wilson's use of color to convey depth and his delineation of form allude to his early mentorship under the French Cubist Fernand Léger. Though this depiction of a Ku Klux Klan lynching evokes the violence between whites and blacks during the mid-twentieth century, the stylized face of the mother is Mexican, connecting Wilson's lived experience of racism in America with the struggles for visibility and independence depicted by the Mexican muralists with whom he studied. —HB



John Woodrow Wilson

American, born 1922

Clockwise, from bottom left:
*Journey of the Mann Family of
Lulu; Embarkation; and Light in
the Window*

Following pages, clockwise
from bottom left:

*Death of Lulu; Mann Attacked;
and The Death of Mann,*

From *The Richard Wright
Suite*, 2001

Etching and aquatint, each
11 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 16 in. (30.2 × 40.6 cm)
Janet and Simeon Braguin
Fund, 2008.94.1.1-.6

Exhibited only at the
Yale University Art Gallery

These six etchings by John Woodrow Wilson illustrate the haunting plot of Richard Wright's short story, "Down by the Riverside." During a flood, the tragic hero, Mann, steals a boat to take his pregnant wife to the hospital. Mann also rescues nearby families from their flooded homes. Despite his charity, Mann is attacked by a group of farmers who take him for a thief and a murderer. At the end of the story, his lifeless body is dropped into the floodwaters. Wilson's use of blue in the etchings and his adherence to narrative plot are stunning departures from his other works. The blue of the water stands in opposition to the blackness of Mann's skin and represents both time and human liberty, neither of which Mann has. The flood and the boat are metaphors for the dislocation Mann and his family endure due to racism and economic injustice; they are adrift in their own town. —HB

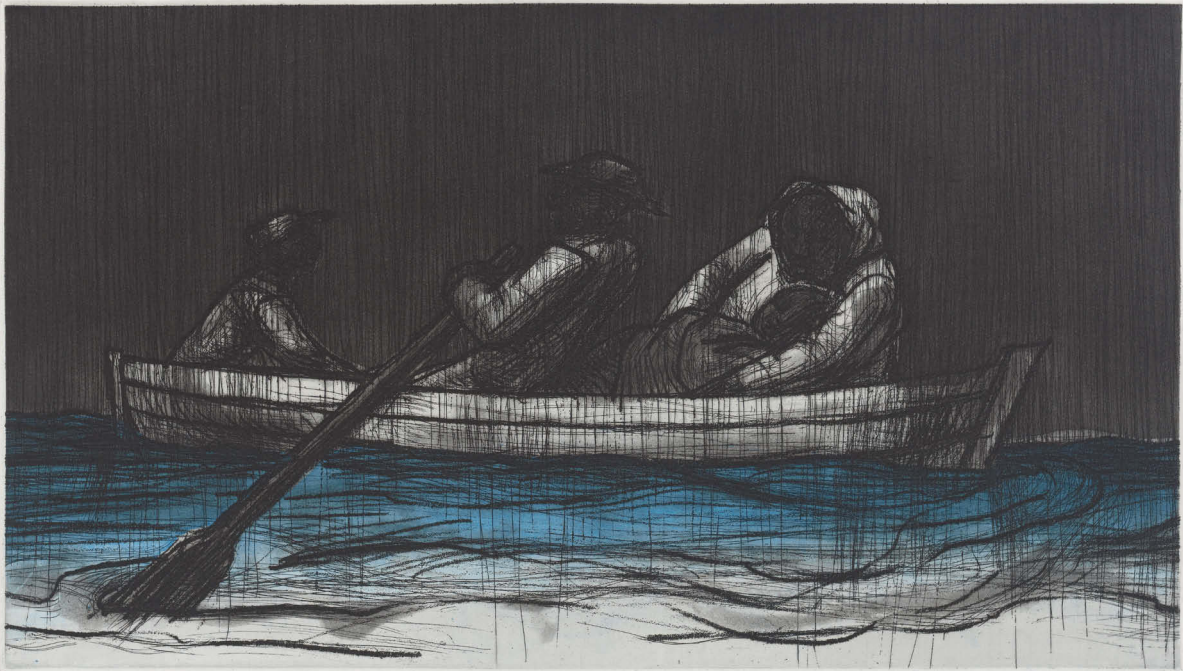








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