BLACK ART: IN THE ABSENCE OF LIGHT
A CURRICULUM

FEATURED: David Driskell. Photo Credit: Courtesy HBO
A run through the wheel of life, not just one aspect of it.

—David Driskell
Art Historian & Artist
WHAT TO EXPECT

I. Film Overview
II. Core Curriculum
III. Research Resources
IV. Art Making Appendix

RECAP
a quick review of major themes

CONSIDER
a reflection on their personal & historical significance

RESEARCH
an opportunity to draw connections

APPLY
an invitation to exercise your knowledge

DISCUSS/REFLECT
a prompt for ongoing discovery
FILM OVERVIEW
In 1976, African American artist, curator and scholar David C. Driskell mounted the pioneering exhibit *Two Centuries of Black American Art* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The exhibition featured more than 200 works of art by 63 Black artists, cementing their essential contributions in the 19th and 20th century. This exhibit is the heart of this 90-minute documentary that looks at the revolutionary impact it had on a generation of African American artists who have claimed their place in the 21st Century art world. There is engaging and insightful commentary from some of the most talented Black artists, curators and historians working today. The HBO documentary film *Black Art: In the Absence of Light* is an imaginative look at the artists, their creative process, and what fuels that creativity.
FILM CREW

Director & Producer, Sam Pollard

Executive Producer, Henry Louis Gates Jr.

Consulting Producer, Thelma Golden
FILM VOICES (In Order of Appearance)

FEATURED ARTISTS

Kerry James Marshall
Sanford Biggers
Jordan Casteel
Betye Saar
Faith Ringgold
Richard Mayhew
Radcliffe Bailey
Kehinde Wiley
Amy Sherald
Hank Willis Thomas
Glenn Ligon
Fred Wilson
Lyle Ashton Harris
Carrie Mae Weems
Kara Walker
Theaster Gates

FEATURED AUTHORS, CURATORS, COLLECTORS & SCHOLARS

David C. Driskell
Valerie Cassel Oliver
Maurice Berger
Sarah Lewis
Mary Schmidt Campbell
Denise Nicholas
Michele Wallace
Rujeko Hockley
Richard Powell
Bernard Lumpkin
Kasseem "Swizz Beatz" Dean
Linda C. Harrison
Thelma Golden
CORE CURRICULUM
Our exploration of the HBO documentary film Black Art: In the Absence of Light moves through 5 modules designed to build your research, writing and curatorial skills. Each explores a theme discussed in the film and foregrounds the creative process of its featured artists and curators. You will emerge from these exercises with a deeper knowledge of art history, artistic production and your own creativity. And don’t forget to visit the Art Making Appendix, which features self-guided, hands-on activities that require little to no art making experience!
I. Defining A Black Aesthetic

II. Bridging Art, Politics & Everyday Life

III. Collecting As Advocacy

IV. Confronting Identity, Otherness & Fear

V. Valuing Black Spaces
LET'S GO!
MODULE I: DEFINING A BLACK AESTHETIC
WHAT DAVID DID WAS HE SAID, ‘THIS IS BLACK ART. IT MATTERS, AND IT’S BEEN GOING ON FOR 200 YEARS. DEAL WITH IT!’

—MAURICE BERGER
ART HISTORIAN
ACTIVITY I: HONE YOUR CURATORIAL VOICE

In this activity, we examine the role of art exhibitions and publications in presenting complex ideas, identities and histories.

MATERIALS NEEDED:
- a web-enabled computer
- a printer or virtual photo album
- scissors or a flat edge
- glue, staples or tape
The film opens with television journalist Tom Brokaw interviewing the late David C. Driskell about his exhibition, *Two Centuries of Black American Art*. Together, they discuss the unique challenge facing Black artists in America—to master their art, to survive in the world, and to be taken seriously, both as an artist and as an individual. In considering the success of this pioneering exhibition, Virginia Museum of Fine Art curator Valerie Cassel Oliver asserts, “It was remarkable that David Driskell could mount an exhibition called *Two Centuries of Black American Art* because, up until that point, you really do not have an exhibition which is authored by a Black curator, which talks about the history and the contemporary manifestations of Black art production in the visual arts. It just didn’t exist!” Not only was Driskell the first curator to create a comprehensive survey of Black art into Modern and Contemporary art history, but he also performed the herculean task of mining 200 years of art history to select only 63 artists. As a curator, Driskell had to make (and defend) difficult choices about which artists and artworks to include.
We also learn in the film’s opening that, in addition to galleries, exhibition catalogs are dynamic extensions of the community an exhibition creates. Artists Sanford Biggers and Jordan Casteel share that the catalogue for *Two Centuries of Black American Art* played a pivotal role in their early development as artists. Biggers recalls, “I didn’t attend the show, but I remember the book—it was in my sister’s bedroom. There was definitely a sense of communication and education I was getting from those images. You have to remember that, at that time, there were very few positive images of Black folks that were widely available. The artists of that time not only were presenting Black people—they were presenting nuanced, idiosyncratic, abstract, beautiful imagery.” In his words, you are reminded just how much representation matters—it helps us connect to ourselves and to each other!
What is art? Who makes it, who consumes it, and who determines its value?

What is a Black aesthetic? Is there one?

How do artworks become part of art history and who writes that narrative?

Where and how does art engage the public?

What is the power dynamic between artists, curators and museums?
Research the 63 artists in *Two Centuries of Black American Art*. (A list can be found in the *Research Resources* section of the syllabus)

Pick three artists whose work you are drawn to. Reflect on your choice. What about these works appeal to you? What are you most drawn to — their form, color, texture or subject matter? What feelings do the works evoke in you? What questions do they raise? How do these three works interact?

Pick three artists whose work you are challenged by, or not immediately drawn to. Reflect on your choice. What is your critique of the material, form or subject matter? How do the feelings these works evoke differ from the feelings evoked by your first three works? What questions do those works raise, and how do they challenge you to think or see differently?

Download or photocopy all 6 works so you can view them side by side, as a collection.
Write a one-page curatorial statement for your exhibition — that’s right, you just curated your very own group show!

In your description, discuss the historical significance of your selected works.

Describe the materiality of each work in detail, using your research to help you paint the fullest picture possible. (Imagine you are describing the work to someone who will never see it!)

Give your exhibition a new title that unifies the themes explored in all 6 works.

Combine your exhibition title, description, six artworks into a zine! More on that [here](#).
Because this curatorial exercise is about your interpretation of the works, consider but don’t dwell on understanding the intent of the artist. Instead, use your imagination and respond to what their work evokes in you!
Share your exhibition and publication with a friend. Invite them into the world you have created!

Before telling them what your exhibition is about, invite them to ask questions.

Really consider their questions before responding. If you don't have an answer, say so. You can then come up with an answer together!
What did you learn most about yourself as you moved through these exercises?

What surprised you most in your research?

How might you use this new curatorial skill set in the future?

How can images evoke a sense of belonging, community and home?

“I JUST FEEL A SENSE OF BELONGING WHEN I LOOK AT THIS BOOK. MY COMMUNITY OF BLACK AMERICAN ARTISTS THAT CAME BEFORE ME HAVE CREATED THE GROUND FOR ME TO BUILD ON. IT’S A BEAUTIFUL THING.”

—JORDAN CASTEEL, ARTIST
VISIT THE APPX.

FOR ART MAKING ACTIVITY 1A
INSPIRED BY KERRY JAMES MARSHALL!
MODULE II: BRIDGING ART, POLITICS & EVERYDAY LIFE
IF THE MET WANTED TO GIVE A REAL DEPICTION OF WHAT BLACK ARTISTS HAD BEEN DOING IN THE PERIOD OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE AND THEREAFTER, WHY NOT DEAL WITH THE ART?

- DAVID DRISKELL
  ART HISTORIAN & ARTIST
In this activity, you will deepen your understanding of what the art world looked like in the 1960’s and ‘70s, a radical moment in America’s history. You will research the artists and institutions that resisted the status quo, like Faith Ringgold and the Studio Museum in Harlem. You will then go back in time and rewrite art history by curating your very own exhibition, featuring artists omitted from the narrative.

**ACTIVITY II:**
**REWRITE ART HISTORY**

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**
- access to a web-enabled computer or your local library
After exploring curatorial and artistic approaches to representation, the film shifts its focus to institutions. In particular, it considers how museums handle representation through their exhibiting and collecting practices. The 1968 exhibition, *Harlem on My Mind*, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was broadly criticized for its anthropological approach to representing Black life. The late art historian Maurice Berger recalls, “Harlem as a kind of fanciful, mystical, magical subject was fine for the MET. But the artists who were doing the work, who were walking the walk, were somehow irrelevant to the story!” Many of the Black artists omitted from the exhibition were part of the protests against it, including the legendary Faith Ringgold. Ringgold makes her stance clear by asserting, “We are Black, but we are equals. I believe thoroughly and completely in freedom of speech and no one’s going to change that.” Building off the powerful momentum of the civil rights movement, Black artists in the 1960's self-organized to form their own collectives, organizations and institutions. The film highlights the rise of one such organization, Spiral, which was founded in 1963 by painters Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis to discuss the role of Black artists in the Civil Rights Movement.
This artist collective, as Harvard University Associate Professor Sarah Lewis asserts, was concerned with the question, “how can artists engage with the civil rights movement, artists who are working through abstract means and artists who are more overtly political?” She expounds, “Spiral was trying to find a way to create a bridge between these seemingly separate worlds.” Here, representation prioritizes collective over singular identity, and is used to mobilize a community of practice. Member and fellow artist Richard Mayhew asserts, “The legacy that they’ve left is unbelievable. These weren’t just artists—these were the mentors of the future of American society.” Here, Mayhew names mentorship as a tool wielded by Black artists to strengthen not just the quality of their work, but also their collective power. The film touches on the importance of mentorship elsewhere, in Betye Saar’s mentorship of Kerry James Marshall and Romare Bearden’s mentorship of David C. Driskell. However, some artists recall being on the outside of Spiral’s organizing efforts. Artist and Feminist Faith Ringgold was one such outsider, who said, “I just stay out until I get in. I did what I wanted to do and paid the price.” What her experience lays bare is that, even within the experience of being a Black American artist, there are still differences of thought and expression that must be discussed.
Why were there no Black artists in *Harlem on My Mind*? Why were James Van Der Zee’s photographs of Black life not considered art?

What did the protests against the exhibition produce?

How did Faith Ringgold bridge Black art and the Civil Rights Movement? How was her approach to this different from the group Spiral that rejected her?

Why was there only one woman in Spiral, Emma Amos?

Who authors art history? Who decides which stories get told and how?
Research The Metropolitan Museum of Art and its 1968 exhibition *Harlem on My Mind*. Learn more about the included artists and artworks. How was Black life represented? Which artforms did the MET use to craft their narrative? Which artforms were omitted?

Now research Black and Brown organizations founded in the 1960s and 70s, like The Studio Museum in Harlem, El Museo del Barrio, and the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute, to name a few. Which artists were being exhibited there? Who curated their early exhibitions? What forms did the artworks take?

Lastly, research the writers that contributed to the exhibition catalogues at these institutions.
Curate your own virtual *Harlem on My Mind* exhibition, featuring select artists omitted from that show, alongside contemporary artists working today.

Use the muscles you exercised in Activity No. 1 to develop and draft a one-page curatorial statement that unifies your exhibition.

Consider the complexity of Black life, and include as many artists as necessary to paint the fullest picture possible. Remember, a virtual exhibition doesn't have the same boundaries as a physical one. Get creative!

Why not use a free blog service to pull your images together and share with the world? Just remember to always credit the artists.
Reflect on Spiral co-founder Norman Lewis’s questions: is there a negro image? What is a Black aesthetic? Is there one?

What are the many roles involved in bringing an exhibition together?

Do any of these excite you as a potential career trajectory?
VISIT THE APPX.

FOR ART MAKING ACTIVITIES 2A/B INSPIRED BY RADCLIFFE BAILEY, JORDAN CASTEEL & AMY SHERALD!
MODULE III: COLLECTING AS ADVOCACY

FEATURED: Fred Wilson. Photo Credit: Courtesy HBO
I’M ALWAYS GRATEFUL THAT PEOPLE COLLECT MY WORK BUT I’M ALSO GRATEFUL WHEN PEOPLE GIVE INSTITUTIONS FUNDS TO BRING THAT WORK INTO PUBLIC COLLECTIONS. BECAUSE THAT'S THE WAY THAT I, AS A YOUNG ARTIST, GOT TO SEE THE WORK. NOT IN PEOPLE’S HOUSES, BUT IN MUSEUMS. SO I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT THAT COLLECTORS THINK ABOUT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS.

-GLENN LIGON
ARTIST
In this activity, you will follow in the footsteps of hip hop artist and art collector, Kasseem “Swizz Beatz” Dean, and build your very own art collection. He thought of his as an imaginary museum dedicated to his kids, however, your collection can be dedicated to whatever or whomever you choose. Consider a cause that matters to you and the kinds of artists you want to promote.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**
- an active social media account
- a virtual platform such as a website, blog or vlog
While much of the film has focused on the contributions of Black artists and curators to art history, it now shifts focus to consider investments from outside the field of artistic production. Black art collectors, such as Kasseem "Swizz Beatz" Dean and Alicia Keys, have invested in the future of the field by increasing awareness of (and access to) practicing artists. This segment teaches us that investment can come in many different forms—financial support, awareness building, advocacy, and mentorship, to name a few. While the term "collector" conjures an image of an individual, this segment also reminds us that many museums are collecting institutions. Through the work of various curatorial committees, they collect or acquire artworks that they then store in their permanent collections, and exhibit from time to time. Oftentimes, when a museum collects an artist’s work, they invest in them in other ways as well, including the production of exhibitions, publications and public programs. Artist Fred Wilson teaches us that while a lot can be learned about a museum from these public facing initiatives, we can also learn from “the underbelly” or what’s hidden out of view.

RECAP
I go into an institution and just absorb that place. For me, it's about looking at everything and talking to everybody, from maintenance to the chairman of the board. It's often what people don't say that gives me ideas about what's going on in the museum. What you see on view is one thing, and what people have in storage can be entirely different—it brings up questions, whereas the public only sees what is created for them.

-Fred Wilson
Artist
Spend some time researching Black art collectors and the focus of their collections. Here are a few named in the film: Bernard Lumpkin, Karen Jenkins Johnson, Lyn and E.T. Williams, Patrick McCoy, and Ronald “Slim” Williams and Bryan “Birdman” Williams.

Also spend some time researching collecting museums and the focus of their collections.

Compare and contrast your findings, considering if there's a difference between how individuals and institutions collect art, and how regularly those collections meet the public.
Following in the footsteps of Wilson, visit your local Museum. (If there are COVID-19 restrictions where you live, get creative and visit their virtual galleries instead!) Do as Wilson does:

- Absorb the place, look at everything, and talk to everybody!

- Document your discoveries. Be sure to bring a notebook and take pictures (if allowed), making note of the artist, title, medium, and year of the works that speak to you. Also, follow in artist Glenn Ligon’s footsteps and note the year the work was acquired by the museum, or who it was lent by.

- Once back at home, revisit your notes, photos and sketches. Collect your research, sketches and notes and compile them into your very own collection portfolio!
WHAT'S EXCITING ABOUT THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLECTORS I’VE GOTTEN TO ENGAGE WITH OVER THE YEARS IS THAT THEY HAVE A JOY, VERVE AND ENTHUSIASM FOR THE WORK THAT REALLY IS AFFIRMING AND GIVES YOU CONFIDENCE.

—HANK WILLIS THOMAS
ARTIST
Using e-mail or social media direct messaging, reach out to one of your selected artists and tell them why you appreciate their work. Why not ask them what they’re currently working on? Sure, you might not hear anything back, however, hopefully your enthusiasm will be contagious!

Promote this artist by posting your favorite work of theirs to your social media accounts, discussing what compels you about their work with your community. Don’t forget to tag the artist! And if you’re feeling bold, why not share your mission statement, and your entire virtual collection?
Considering Professor Powell’s words below, what makes a work of art powerful to you?

How do you define the “potential” of a work of art? Potential to start a conversation? Potential to sell? Think about what type of potential matters most to you.

What are you learning about your evolving curatorial taste?

Do you prefer one particular medium over another, like sculpture over painting? Why?

Is there a pattern to what you select? What do your selected artists have in common, if anything?

“THE PATRONS OF GOOD ART HAVE TO HAVE A VISION AND MIND TO SAY THAT I WANT TO ENGAGE WITH SOMETHING THAT MAY NOT BE UNIVERSALLY APPRECIATED OR LOVED, BUT I SEE POWER AND POTENTIAL IN IT.”

-RICHARD POWELL, PROFESSOR OF ART AND ART HISTORY, DUKE UNIVERSITY
MODULE IV: CONFRONTING IDENTITY, OTHERNESS & FEAR

FEATURED: Lyle Ashton Harris. Photo Credit: Courtesy HBO
THE FEARS OF OTHERNESS ARE PLAYED OUT, MOST OFTEN, AROUND THIS NOTION OF BLACK MASCULINITY. I THINK IT'S VERY IMPORTANT THAT, IN LOOKING AT IT, WE UNDERSTAND MUCH OF WHAT COMES TO BE RACISM, SEXISM AND HOMOPHOBIA IN THIS CULTURE.

—THELMA GOLDEN
DIRECTOR & CHIEF CURATOR, THE STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
In this activity, you will be asked to follow what artist Lyle Ashton Harris terms your “inner guidance” and speak your truth! While this is primarily a writing reflection, feel free to use any materials at your disposal to explore your identity and confront your fears!

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**
- a mirror
- a pen and paper
- a voice recorder or phone (optional)
In this segment, the film looks at the 1994 exhibition, *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art* at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The daring exhibition, curated by Thelma Golden, surveyed the nuances of Black masculinity as depicted in the works of 29 contemporary, Black artists. Painter Kehinde Wiley recalls seeing the exhibition as a young man and being inspired by how the artists embraced Black masculinity as “another color on their palette.” Through this exhibition, Golden ushered in a renewed interest in the discussion of identity politics within the museum space. Fellow curator Valerie Cassel Oliver asserts, “It was very important to show the nuances, the beauty—the lure and loathing, if you will—that comes with the Black male body in particular, and to put that into the larger conversation.” By exposing gender, sexuality and race as constructs, the exhibition was illuminating for some, and downright unsettling for others. Much like the other exhibitions explored in this film, *Black Male* asked challenging questions and went down in the history books as one of the most important exhibitions of our time.
“It looked at the body as a sign of strength. It looked at masculinity as a sign of performance. It looked at femininity as an invention. It really threw open this question of, how does choice become the central role of the artist?”

— Kehinde Wiley, Artist

How (and where) is identity performed?

What choices do you make every day about how you will present yourself to the world?
Spend some time reflecting on your image in the mirror. Really look at yourself! Watch your facial expressions as you respond to external (and internal) stimuli. What do your expressions teach you about yourself? How does your self image shift over time?

Now conduct a similar exercise but using photographs of yourself. Study at least 10 images of yourself taken over a long period of time. When do you resemble your most authentic self? When, instead, are you performing? Who is your audience? Track your identity expression. How do you use clothes, your hairstyle, and your mannerisms to regularly reinvent yourself?

Lastly, spend some time researching the history of the communities with which you self-identify. Perhaps you identify as part of the LGBTQI+ community, or the Latinx community, or both! Do some digging to uncover at least one new fact about the lineage and legacy of those you identify with.
IT'S SPEAKING YOUR TRUTH. IT'S NOT SO MUCH ABOUT TRYING TO MAKE THE WORK STAND OUT. IT'S ABOUT TRUSTING YOUR PROCESS, IDEAS AND INNER GUIDANCE.

—LYLE ASHTON HARRIS ARTIST
• Grab a blank piece of paper. Before writing on it, reflect on something about your personal identity that is complicated or challenging for you. Use your voice recorder at any time to talk through more complex ideas that you might need to revisit.

• Write down the first 5 words that come to mind that you would use to describe yourself to someone else.

• Now write down 5 words you would use to describe yourself to yourself.

• Consider how those 10 words fit together, and perhaps rub up against each other to produce friction.

• Develop your own process for expanding your self-discovery. Perhaps you paint a series of self-portraits, or maybe you call a friend and ask them to share their perceptions of you. Whatever you decide, lean into it! This is your unique process, so trust your “inner guidance!”

• Once you more fully understand how you see yourself, develop a self-care affirmation. This should be a sentence you say aloud to yourself that empowers you to step out into the world, confident of who you are!
Find someone you would consider different from you, in terms of how they self-identify.

Share some of what you discovered about yourself. Invite them to discuss their identity!
IN A SURVEY OF MAJOR AMERICAN MUSEUMS, IT WAS DETERMINED THAT 85% OF ARTISTS IN THOSE COLLECTIONS ARE WHITE. IF YOU BREAK DOWN THE NUMBER OF ARTISTS OF COLOR IN THOSE COLLECTIONS, IT'S 1.2% BLACK. IF THE PEOPLE SITTING AT THE TABLE OF A CURATORIAL MEETING ARE ALL WHITE, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE A PROBLEM. YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE A PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY IN TERMS OF THE WORK YOU'RE GOING TO SELECT.

—MAURICE BERGER
ART HISTORIAN
Are the stereotypes artists were confronting in the Black Male exhibition still prevalent today?

How has public perception shifted, if at all, concerning fear of the Black, male body?

If this exhibition were being curated today, what additional questions would it address?

What did you learn about yourself during this process that surprised you?
VISIT THE APPX.

FOR ART MAKING ACTIVITY 4A INSPIRED BY KARA WALKER!
MODULE V: VALUING BLACK SPACES
THE STUDIO MUSEUM WAS A FOCAL POINT. I BECAME A PART OF THAT GROUP OF INTELLECTUALS AND ARTISTS ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MOMENT IN WHICH WE LIVED. THE STUDIO MUSEUM IS STILL THE FOCAL POINT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTIC PRODUCTION IN THE COUNTRY, IF NOT ON THE PLANET! IT IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT INSTITUTIONS THAT WE HAVE.

—CARRIE MAE WEEMS
ARTIST
In this activity, you will identify a place where you feel a sense of belonging and home. You will consider the role of art in creating and sustaining the community there. In this final exercise, you will take what you've learned throughout all five modules and apply it to designing a space for your creativity to thrive!

**ACTIVITY V: DESIGN AN ART SPACE**

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**
- a pen and paper
- a web-enabled computer
In the final segment of the film, we learn about the important role Black spaces have played in building community, providing a sense of belonging, launching careers, producing scholarship, and preserving Black culture. 2015/16 Studio Museum in Harlem Artist-In-Residence Jordan Casteel recalls, “Being at The Studio Museum in Harlem brought me home. There is an oasis for me there, and a place to always go back to. There is a real community of people that care about me still and are invested in me. That investment can take you beyond anything you ever imagined!” In addition to Casteel, the film features others who have called the Studio Museum home: Kerry James Marshall who was a resident artist from 1985-1986; Sanford Biggers who was a resident artist from 1999-2000; Rujecko Hockley who was a former Curatorial Assistant from 2007-2009; and Mary Schmidt Campbell who served as director of the museum from 1977-1987.
David C. Driskell and Professor Lewis remind us that historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have always been fierce advocates for the Black American artist. Driskell asserts, “When nobody else was out there championing these artists, HBCUs were there, claiming them, showcasing them, putting them up on the wall, teaching about them.” Professor Lewis poignantly adds, “Without the work of historically Black colleges and universities, we wouldn't have a repository of African American art that we could draw from.” Fisk, Howard, and Spelman—all with their own collections, art galleries or museums—are named as pioneering yet often under recognized institutions advancing the scholarship and community surrounding Black art. The film concludes by looking at the interdisciplinary practice of artist Theaster Gates. A trained ceramicist, Gates also studied urban planning and expanded his practice to include the creation of Black spaces in Chicago. Gates represents a new generation of makers, interested in using their artistic practice to drive change beyond their studios. Professor Lewis expounds, “Theaster Gates is one of the beacons of this change. He’s done this through the Rebuild Foundation with his actual space. He’s done this through the creation of the Black Artists Retreat. He’s done this through his own artmaking practice, and through the fellowship that he provides other artists.” What this segment makes clear is that space creation is both a creative and a critical exercise, and that artists—with their creativity and entrepreneurial spirit—are uniquely poised to lead the way!
FOR BLACK ART TO THRIVE, IT'S ALWAYS REQUIRED SPACES, FELLOWSHIP AND COMMUNITY. THE STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM PROVIDED THAT WHEN REALLY NO OTHER INSTITUTION DID.

- SARAH LEWIS
HARVARD UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
CONSIDER

- In what spaces do you feel a sense of belonging or home?
- What words would you use to describe this space to someone else?
- How would you characterize those spaces? Are they physical, spiritual, emotional, virtual, conceptual, hypothetical, or imaginary?
- Is it a space you got to be alone or with other people? Both?
- Do you go there every day, or is it somewhere you go only on special occasion?
Research the intellectuals and artists who have come through the Studio Museum in Harlem. Look at historic exhibitions, read through catalogue essays online, and do some detective work to learn more about the hundreds of artists who have come through the museum’s residency program.

Now pick one of the HBCU’s named in the film and do some research into their art department, art collection, and exhibition history. Look at digital publications, and find a video clip of a public program or artist talk online.

Lastly, pick an artist-founded space or artist collective and research the people involved in bringing that space to fruition. Who did the artist partner with to transform their vision into reality?
Considering everything you’ve learned about yourself and your communities, design a space in which your collective creativity can thrive!

- Perhaps this is an online forum (that you curate) where, each week, you invite your peers to share an artwork and piece of literature that inspires them

- Or maybe, it’s a mural that you start in your neighborhood, and invite others to add to during a monthly meet-up

- What about a mail-art project, where you start a collage, mail it to a friend who adds a layer and mails it to another friend until your collective visual narrative is complete?

In the age of COVID-19 and social distancing, building space and sustaining community is a real challenge. Just lean into your instincts and design the space that feels most sustaining for you and those you care about!
The creation of a dynamic space often relies on partnership and collaboration. If you were to scale your design up, who would you need on your team?

How nimble is your design? Can it be transformed by those you invite to use it?

What are your rules for engagement?
I saw the need to build cultural awareness by helping to revise and redefine American art.

—David Driskell
Art Historian & Artist
ARTISTS FEATURED IN
TWO CENTURIES OF BLACK AMERICAN ART

Charles H. Alston
William E. Artis
John James Audubon
Edward M. Bannister
Richmond Barthé
Romare Bearden
John Biggers
Grafton Tyler Brown
Calvin Burnett
Selma Burke
Margaret T. Burroughs
David Butler
Elizabeth Catlett
Claude Clark
Eldzier Cortor
Allan Rohan Crite
Dave the Potter
Thomas Day
Joseph Delaney
Aaron Douglas
Robert S. Duncanson
William Edmondson
Minnie Evans
Edwin A. Harleston
Palmer Hayden
James V. Herring
Felrath Hines
Earl J. Hooks
Julien Hudson
Clementine Hunter
Wilmer Jennings
James Butler Johnson
Malvin Gray Johnson
Sargent Johnson
William H. Johnson
Joshua Johnson
Lois Mailou Jones
Jacob Lawrence
Hughie Lee-Smith
Edmonia Lewis
Norman Lewis
James A. Porter
Malvin Gray Johnson
Sargent Johnson
William H. Johnson
Joshua Johnson
Lois Mailou Jones
Jacob Lawrence
Hughie Lee-Smith
Edmonia Lewis
Norman Lewis
James A. Porter
Patrick Reason
John Rhoden
Gregory Ridley
William Edouard Scott
Charles Sebree
Henry Ossawa Tanner
Bill Traylor
Alma W. Thomas
Dox Thrash
Laura Wheeler Waring
Edward Webster
James Lesesne Wells
Charles White
Walter Williams
Ed Wilson
Ellis Wilson
John Wilson
Hale Woodruff
1928
- The Howard University Gallery of Art is officially established

1949
- Carl Van Vechten Art Gallery at Fisk University is founded

1963
- The artist collective *Spiral* is founded by Norman Lewis and Romare Bearden in response to the Civil Rights Movement. The members included Emma Amos, Calvin Douglass, Perry Ferguson, Reginald Gammon, Felrath Hines, Alvin Hollingsworth, William Majors, Richard Mayhew, Earl Miller, Merton D. Simpson, and James Yeargans

1968
- The exhibition *Harlem on my Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968* opens at the Metropolitan Museum of Art
- The Studio Museum in Harlem is founded by a diverse group of artists, activists, philanthropists and Harlem residents
I THINK THERE’S ABSOLUTELY SOMETHING HAPPENING RIGHT NOW. BUT I ALSO DON’T WANT TO MAKE THIS MOMENT SEEM SO SINGULAR AND SPECIAL. THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN BLACK ARTISTS, THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN BLACK CURATORS, THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN BLACK COLLECTORS. THEY PERHAPS HAVE JUST NOT BEEN PART OF THE MAINSTREAM.

—RUJEKO HOCKLEY
ASSISTANT CURATOR, WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
1969
- Artists Benny Andrews and Clifford R. Joseph co-founded The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition and protest the *Harlem on my Mind* exhibition

1970
- Faith Ringgold and her daughter Michele Wallace co-founded *Women, Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation*
- A fifteen-year-old Kerry James Marshall paints his first oil painting, inspired by legendary artist Charles White

1976
- David C. Driskell curates the seminal art exhibition, *Two Centuries of Black American Art* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

1977
- *Two Centuries of Black American Art* travels from LACMA to Atlanta’s High Museum of Art, the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, and the Brooklyn Museum
- Mary Schmidt Campbell becomes Director of the Studio Museum in Harlem
WHAT DRISKELL DID WAS HE DEMONSTRATED THAT THERE WAS A LINEAGE, THERE WAS A HISTORY, AND THAT HISTORY WAS FILLED NOT ONLY WITH PAINTING AND SCULPTURE, BUT ALSO THE DECORATIVE ARTS, ARCHITECTURE, DRAWINGS–IT REALLY GAVE US THIS ENORMOUS SENSE OF THE LEGACY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS.

—MARY SCHMIDT CAMPBELL
PRESIDENT, SPelman COLLEGE
1980
- Kerry James Marshall paints *The Portrait of an Artist as the Shadow of His Former Self*
- Jean-Michel Basquiat emerges on the art scene

1985
- Kerry James Marshall is an Artist-in-Residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem

1988
- Thelma Golden becomes a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art

1994

1996
- The Spelman College Museum of Fine Art is founded
THERE IS WORK THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE USING THE BLACK FIGURE IN PAINTING AS A MEANINGFUL PART OF THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE.

—KERRY JAMES MARSHALL ARTIST
1999
- Sanford Biggers is an Artist-in-Residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem

2001
- The David C. Driskell Center is established to serve as an intellectual home for artists, museum professionals, art administrators and scholars

2005
- Thelma Golden becomes Director of The Studio Museum in Harlem

2007
- Rujeko Hockley joins the Studio Museum as a Curatorial Assistant

2009
- The Rebuild Foundation is Founded by artist Theaster Gates in Chicago
THERE HAS BEEN AN AWAKENING, AWARENESS AND ENLIGHTENMENT THROUGH EDUCATION. THROUGH THE DESIRE TO WANT TO KNOW. ON THE OTHER HAND, IN THE WORDS OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., 'WE HAVEN'T REACHED THE PROMISED LAND. WE’VE GOT A LONG WAY TO GO.'

—DAVID DRISKELL
ART HISTORIAN & ARTIST
2013
- Theaster Gates and Eliza Myrie found *The Black Artists Retreat*, an annual convening of Black visual artists held in Chicago

2014
- Kara Walker partners with Creative Time to debut her installation, *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*
- *The Dean Collection* is founded by Kasseem "Swizz Beatz" Dean and his wife Alicia Keys

2015
- Mary Schmidt Campbell becomes the President of Spelman College
- Jordan Casteel is an Artist-in-Residence at The Studio Museum in Harlem

2018
- Amy Sherald and Kehinde Wiley are commissioned to paint the official portraits of Michelle and Barack Obama that now hang at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.
WE ARE PART OF A CONTINUED RENAISSANCE–IT'S BEEN HAPPENING. WHAT I’M MOST EXCITED ABOUT IS, DO WE HAVE THE CAPACITY TO BE GREAT MAKERS IN THE ABSENCE OF LIGHT?

—Theaster Gates
Artist
-87

BIographies
Sam Pollard is an accomplished feature film and television video editor, and documentary producer/director.

Between 1990 and 2010, Mr. Pollard edited a number of Spike Lee’s films: Mo’ Better Blues, Jungle Fever, Girl 6, Clockers, and Bamboozled. Mr. Pollard and Mr. Lee co-produced a number of documentary productions for the small and big screen, Four Little Girls, a feature-length documentary about the 1963 Birmingham church bombings which was nominated for an Academy Award and When The Levees Broke, a four part documentary that won numerous awards, including a Peabody and three Emmy Awards. Five years later 2010 he co-produced and supervised the edit on the follow up to Levees If God Is Willing And Da Creek Don’t Rise.

Since 2012 Mr. Pollard has completed as a producer/director Slavery By Another Name a 90-minute documentary for PBS that was in competition at the Sundance Festival, August Wilson: The Ground On Which I Stand a 90-minute documentary in 2015 for American Masters, Two Trains Runnin’ a feature length documentary in 2016 that premiered at the Full Frame Film Festival. Sammy Davis Jr., I’ve Gotta Be Me for American Masters premiered at the 2017 Toronto International Film Festival. In 2019 Mr. Pollard co-directed the Six Part Series Why We Hate that premiered on The Discovery Channel. His most recent work is as one of the directors on the 2020 HBO Series Atlanta’s Missing and Murdered: The Lost Children.
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. is the Alphonse Fletcher University Professor and Director of the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard University. Emmy Award-winning filmmaker, literary scholar, journalist, cultural critic, and institution builder, Professor Gates has authored or co-authored twenty-four books and created twenty-one documentary films, including Wonders of the African World, African American Lives, Faces of America, Black in Latin America, Black America since MLK: And Still I Rise, and Africa’s Great Civilizations. Finding Your Roots, his groundbreaking genealogy series now in its sixth season on PBS, has been called “one of the deepest and wisest series ever on television,” leveraging “the inherent entertainment capacity of the medium to educate millions of Americans about the histories and cultures of our nation and the world.”


Having written for such leading publications as The New Yorker, The New York Times, and Time, Professor Gates serves as chairman of TheRoot.com, a daily online magazine he co-founded in 2008, and chair of the Creative Board of FUSION TV. He oversees the Oxford African American Studies Center, the first comprehensive scholarly online resource in the field, and has received grant funding to develop a Finding Your Roots curriculum to teach students science through genetics and genealogy. In 2012, The Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Reader, a collection of his writings edited by Abby Wolf, was published.
The recipient of fifty-six honorary degrees and numerous prizes, Professor Gates was a member of the first class awarded “genius grants” by the MacArthur Foundation in 1981, and in 1998, he became the first African American scholar to be awarded the National Humanities Medal. He was named to *Time*’s 25 Most Influential Americans list in 1997, to *Ebony*’s Power 150 list in 2009, and to *Ebony*’s Power 100 list in 2010 and 2012. He earned his B.A. in History, *summa cum laude*, from Yale University in 1973, and his M.A. and Ph.D. in English Literature from Clare College at the University of Cambridge in 1979. In 2018, he was one of 15 alumni of African descent honored in the exhibition, *Black Cantabs: History Makers*, at the Cambridge University Library. He also is an Honorary Fellow, Clare College, at the University of Cambridge.

Professor Gates has directed the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research — now the Hutchins Center — since arriving at Harvard in 1991, and during his first fifteen years on campus, he chaired the Department of Afro-American Studies as it expanded into the Department of African and African American Studies with a full-fledged doctoral program. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and serves on a wide array of boards, including the New York Public Library, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Aspen Institute, Jazz at Lincoln Center, the Whitney Museum of American Art, Library of America, and the Brookings Institution. In 2017, the Organization of American States named Gates a Goodwill Ambassador for the Rights of People of African Descent in the Americas. In 2011, his portrait, by Yuqi Wang, was hung in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.
Thelma Golden is Director and Chief Curator of The Studio Museum in Harlem, where she began her career in 1987 before joining the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1988. She returned to the Studio Museum in 2000 as Deputy Director for Exhibitions and Programs, and was named Director and Chief Curator in 2005. Golden was appointed to the Committee for the Preservation of the White House by President Obama in 2010, and in 2015 joined the Barack Obama Foundation’s Board of Directors. Golden was the recipient of the 2016 Audrey Irmas Award for Curatorial Excellence. In 2018, Golden was awarded a J. Paul Getty Medal. She has received honorary degrees from Bard College, the City College of New York, Columbia University, and Smith College.