

Code Switch: Distributing Blackness, Reprogramming Internet Art

October 15–December 19, 2024

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

“The need to articulate where exactly the Black avant-garde is propagating is important for Black artists resisting exploitation and de-politicization.”

—Anaïs (An) Duplan

The first of its kind internationally, *Code Switch: Distributing Blackness, Reprogramming Internet Art* is a multi-sited exhibition exploring and redefining the history of “Black data,” centering and celebrating contributions by artists of African descent to the rapidly advancing field of new media art and digital practice. Drawing its title from André L. Brock’s groundbreaking text *Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures* (2020), this exhibition explores the relationship between Black cultural production and the legacy of computation as a mode of machinic engagement and creative inspiration.

The debut of this project’s “broadcast” begins on view at The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, presented by The Kitchen from October 15 – December 19, 2024. This marks an unprecedented collaboration between two storied New York institutions. From The Kitchen’s founding in 1971, the organization has remained a leading nexus for experimental artists; as part of its institutional history, The Kitchen maintains a living archive of over 4,000 artists. Founded in 1925, the Schomburg’s mission is to preserve African American, African Diasporan, and African experiences; its research library and collections, a division of The New York Public Library, are internationally renowned.

These archives are mutual sites ripe for interventions, discovery, memory-making, and decolonial praxis. The first of the exhibition’s two parts explores the work of visual artists David Drake (otherwise known as “Dave the Potter”), Tom Lloyd, Benjamin Patterson, Howardena Pindell, Candis Mosely Pettway, Mattie Ross, Ulysses Jenkins, Milford Graves, Faith Ringgold, Blondell Cummings, Lorraine O’Grady, and Jack Whitten with Afrofuturist science fiction authors Octavia Butler and Samuel R. Delany, composer and scholar of experimental music George Lewis, and guerilla archivist, access television producer, and librarian, Marion Stokes. These creative practitioners via their artistic innovations establish new sightlines to a Black networked life, an empowered avant-garde algorithm that predates and extends beyond the invention of the internet.

Alongside the radical visions of these makers and thinkers are the data-visualizations of sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois and the contributions of Black computer scientists, mathematicians, and engineers Evelyn Boyd Granville, Dorothy Vaughan, Creola Katherine Johnson, Mary Jackson, Annie Easley, Gladys West, and Clarence “Skip” Ellis.

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On view as well are rarely seen selections from the Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited (HARYOU), an American social activism organization founded by psychologists Kenneth Clark and Mamie Phipps Clark in 1962. The first HARYOU report titled “Youth in the Ghetto: A study of the consequences of powerlessness and a blueprint for change” made data-driven, consciousness-raising recommendations and was published in 1964 following the Harlem uprisings.

The internet’s inception in 1969 arises out of the U.S. government-funded military intelligence initiative of ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) as the first public operational computer network. There is an uneasy relationship between the technological advancements and motivations that became the foundation of the internet, which reveal complex dilemmas and questions of consent and agency in the face of surveillance and data extraction. These phenomena redefine modernity and visual culture. Code Switch surveys how artists and creative technologists rattle the promise of cyberspace as an equitable site of representation and liberation, upending it as an undercurrent and generative force for both inquiry and resistance.

In Spring 2025 (April 25–September 7, 2025) The Kitchen will present the second part of this exhibition, a contemporary group show, in partnership with Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD).




Code Switch: Distributing Blackness, Reprogramming Internet Art is organized by Legacy Russell, Executive Director & Chief Curator, and Angelique Rosales Salgado, Curatorial Assistant, with contributed research by Tsige Tafesse, 2023-2024 Curatorial Fellow, and Kyla Gordon, 2024-2025 Curatorial Fellow, The Kitchen. Exhibition design by Pacific.

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ILLUSTRATED EXHIBITION CHECKLIST & DIDACTICS


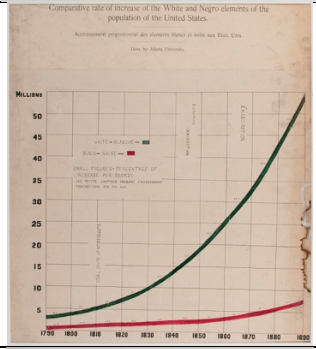
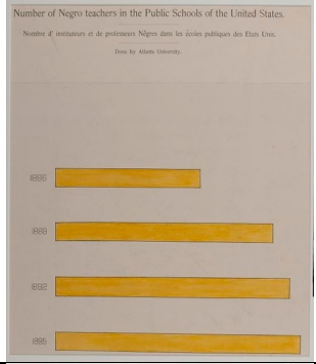
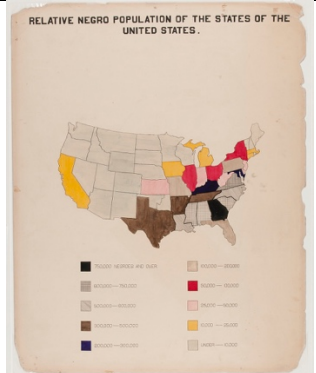
		<p>David Drake (“Dave the Potter”) (b. 1800, Edgefield District, SC; d. c 1870’s, Edgefield District, SC)</p> <p><i>Storage Jar</i>, 1858 Manufacturer: Stony Bluff Manufactory, Alkaline-glazed stoneware Sculpture: height: 22 5/8 in.; diameter: 27 in.; circumference: 72 in. Image: 16 x 21 in. Reproduction. Image provided by The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Public Domain</p>
		<p>David Drake (“Dave the Potter”)</p> <p><i>Jug</i>, 1853 Manufacturer: Stony Bluff Manufactory, Alkaline-glazed stoneware Sculpture: height: 14 3/4 in. Images (1–2): 16 x 21 in.; (2–4): 21 x 16 in. Reproduction. Collection of Glenn Ligon. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY</p>
		



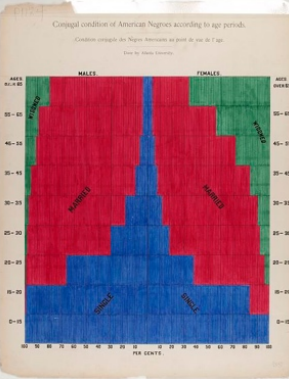
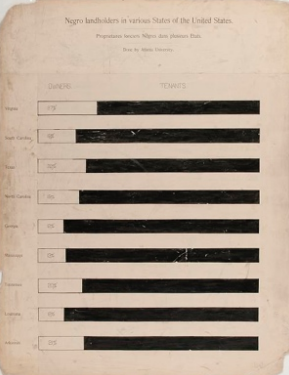
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David Drake, known colloquially as “Dave the Potter,” was an enslaved African– American artisan who hand produced ceramic storage vessels, often with an alkaline glaze, from the 1820s to the 1870s. With Drake bearing the surname of the family that enslaved him, records show that he spent the majority of his life in Edgefield, South Carolina. From 1817 forward, Edgefield became known as the “crossroads of clay” due to the fertile nature of the land and its clay deposits. A wide range of global techniques, alongside novel technological advances in firing and glazing, made it possible to produce sturdy, utilitarian, and inexpensive ceramics that could be used for a variety of purposes. While in continental Africa it was standard to have potters be women, Drake, born in the United States, appears to have broken from a gender binary, studying the art of pottery from European men. He created his work at a variety of dimensions, both on a wheel and by applying the time-intensive manual coil technique. Drake was one of seventy-six enslaved people who, in the antebellum period, produced pottery for the Edgefield District’s factories. Whereas many enslaved people were kept from learning how to read or write, Drake marked his vessels with a lyrical selection of poetic phrases, often accompanied by the date and his name or his initials. In a period where African–American people were tasked to physically perform as machines inside of an economy that sought to forcibly extract their labor by exploiting their fungibility, Drake’s marking of his pottery pieces was a computational application of individual data that pronounced his humanity, rejecting an anonymous mechanic identity and claiming his place in history.

			<p>W.E.B. Du Bois (b. 1868, Great Barrington, MA; d. 1963, Accra, Ghana)</p> <p>Occupations in which American Negroes are engaged, <i>W. E. B. Du Bois: Charting Black Lives</i>, c 1900 Ink and watercolor on paper 16 x 20 in. Reproduction. Image provided by Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC. Image source: Public Domain</p>
			<p>W.E.B. Du Bois</p> <p>Comparative rate of increase of the white and Negro elements of the population of the United States, <i>W. E. B. Du Bois: Charting Black Lives</i>, c 1900 Ink and watercolor on paper 16 x 18 in. Reproduction. Image provided by Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC. Image source: Public Domain</p>
			<p>W.E.B. Du Bois</p> <p>Number of Negro teachers in the public schools of the United States, <i>W. E. B. Du Bois: Charting Black Lives</i>, c 1900 Ink and watercolor on paper 16 x 19 in. Reproduction. Image provided by Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC. Image source: Public Domain</p>
			<p>W.E.B. Du Bois</p> <p>Relative Negro population of the states of the United States, <i>W. E. B. Du Bois: Charting Black Lives</i>, c 1900 Ink and watercolor on paper 16 x 20 in. Reproduction. Image provided by Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC. Image source: Public Domain</p>

			<p>W.E.B. Du Bois The states of the United States according to their Negro population, <i>W. E. B. Du Bois: Charting Black Lives</i>, c 1900 Ink and watercolor on paper 16 x 20 in. Reproduction. Image provided by Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC. Image source: Public Domain</p>
			<p>W.E.B. Du Bois Slaves and free Negroes, <i>W. E. B. Du Bois: Charting Black Lives</i>, c 1900 Ink and watercolor on paper 16 x 20 in. Reproduction. Image provided by Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC. Image source: Public Domain</p>
			<p>W.E.B. Du Bois Conjugal condition of American Negroes according to age periods, <i>W. E. B. Du Bois: Charting Black Lives</i>, c 1900 Ink and watercolor on paper 16 x 20 in. Reproduction. Image provided by Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC. Image source: Public Domain</p>
			<p>W.E.B. Du Bois Negro landholders in various states of the United States, <i>W. E. B. Du Bois: Charting Black Lives</i>, c 1900 Ink and watercolor on paper 16 x 20 in. Reproduction. Image provided by Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC. Image source: Public Domain</p>

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These eight charts, graphs, and maps were part of a series of 60 graphic data visualizations created by Black sociologist, historian, and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois of statistical data depicting Black life post-Reconstruction. These charts were first publicly displayed at the 1900 Exposition Universelle (the Paris World's Fair) and were included in an exhibition called *The American Negro* which aimed to show the progress of African-Americans post-slavery. Du Bois's practice sought to advance the rights and position of African-Americans in U.S. society. He aimed to challenge the prevailing racist notion of the time period that stated that Black people were scientifically inferior by producing sociological research proving that slavery and its aftermath was the reason for their unequal place in society. These charts were the result of extensive statistical field research organized by Du Bois and executed in collaboration with his students at Atlanta University where he was a professor.

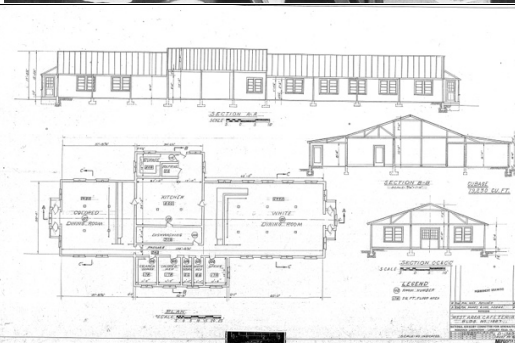
Du Bois's charts document the lives and contributions of Black southern populations, visualizing data across social, economic, and cultural metrics in the post-Reconstruction era. The moment was marked by the wake of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) and before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, when Black people were not consistently documented or deemed worthy of official government records. These hand-drawn graphics were created in colorful ink, watercolor gouache, and incorporate photographic prints, expressing Black statistical data with remarkable care. Colorful graphs show blooming spirals, vibrant fields, modernist typography, and modular shapes that seem to look to an African graphic tradition for inspiration and far predate the work of European avant-garde artists. These works are artful exercises in care, presenting data as Black potential and showing that Black lives were not only worthy of record, but that Black populations were making impactful contributions to the fabric of a nation.



Dorothy Vaughan (b. 1910, Kansas City, MO; d. 2008, Hampton, VA)

Engineering drawing file #LD-13899 of West Area Cafeteria (Building 1227) showing segregated dining. Vaughan served as the head of the West Area Computers, 1944–1948

Inkjet pigment print, color; 24 x 15.5 in.
Reproduction. Image provided by The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Langley Research Center

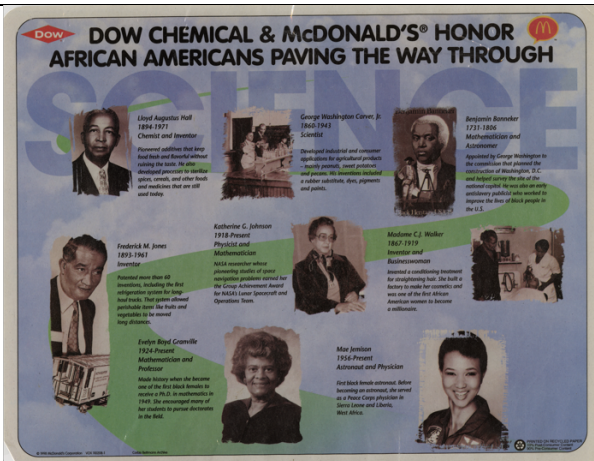


Left to Right: Dorothy Vaughan, Lessie Hunter, Vivian Adair (Margaret Ridenhour and Charlotte Craidon in back) c 1960

Inkjet pigment print, color; 20 x 15.5 in.
Reproduction. Image provided by The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Langley Research Center; gift of B. Golemba

Black mathematician and “human computer” Dorothy Vaughan was the head of the Jim Crow era segregated West Area Computing Unit at the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) from 1949 until 1958. One of very few women employed in this unit at the time, Vaughan was NACA's first Black supervisor and stewarded staff training in the coding and

programming language FORTRAN, first developed by IBM in 1957. Vaughan worked closely with white “human computers” across gender lines on a wide variety of projects, intersectional with the processing of aeronautical research data. NACA became NASA in 1958. Vaughan, a pioneer in electronic computing, retired from NASA in 1971. Her influence and legacy as a “human computer” marks a lineage connecting groundbreaking alumni of West Area Computing such as Mary Jackson, Katherine G. Johnson, Kathaleen Land, Eunice Smith, and Kathryn Peddrew. Dr. Christine Darden who spent four decades at NASA is known to be one of the succeeding next generations of Black engineers and data analysts whose pathway was paved by the contributions of Vaughan.



Evelyn Boyd Granville (b. 1924, Washington, D.C.; d. 2023, Silver Spring, MD)

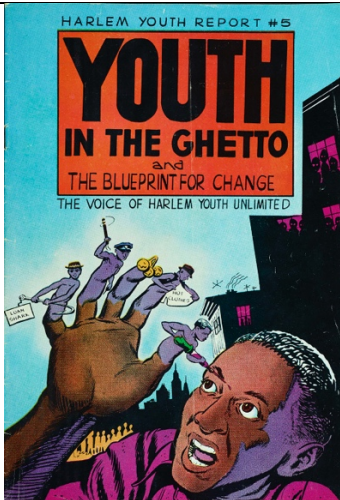
“Dow Chemical & McDonald’s Honor African–Americans Paving the Way Through,” 1998
 Inkjet pigment print, color
 28 x 21 in.
 Evelyn Boyd Granville papers, Sophia Smith Collection, SSC-MS-00747
 Reproduction. Image provided by Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts



Dr. Evelyn Boyd Granville working on the IBM 704 IBM Vanguard Computing Center, Washington, D.C., c 1950
 Inkjet pigment print, black and white
 16 x 19 in.
 Evelyn Boyd Granville papers, Sophia Smith Collection, SSC-MS-00747
 Reproduction. Image provided by Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, Massachusetts

Dr. Evelyn Boyd Granville, a mathematician, scientist, engineer, and educator, was the second African American woman to receive a PhD in Mathematics, from Yale University in 1949. She found French literature “uninteresting” during her studies, instead was captivated by mathematics, physics, and astronomy; her field of choice was functional analysis, a branch of mathematics focusing on the relationships between objects. Granville’s pioneering work in academia, government, and industry, began at the National Bureau of Standards (NBS) in Washington, D.C. as an applied mathematician, working on the mathematical analysis of problems related to missile fuses. “The development of electronic computers was in its infancy,” Granville recalled, which translated into her burgeoning fascination with the application of computers to scientific studies leading her to writing computer programs at International Business Machines Corporation (IBM). She was quickly seated before the IBM 650, the first mass-produced computer in the world.

The United States space program was advancing rapidly, and Granville was assigned to join IBM's Vanguard Computing Center, developing computer software to analyze satellite orbits for NASA space programs: "If I had known then that in the distant future the United States would launch its space program, I might have become an astronomer instead of a mathematician." Her path breaking advancements then took her to Los Angeles to work at North American Aviation as a research specialist in celestial mechanics and orbit computation, where she developed digital computer techniques for engineers working on the Apollo Project, along with Black mathematician and "human computer" Katherine G. Johnson (Katherine herself calculated the flight path for the first NASA orbital mission). Granville's ambition propelled her as an expert in computer science before it became recognized as a discipline. In almost every one of her professional roles, she was the only Black person and the only woman on her team: "If a door opened," she said, "I went in." This translated into her dedication as an educator, particularly in computer programming and mathematical education of those training to be elementary school teachers. She held firm her belief that mathematics itself is both a practice of logic and of beauty, and should be regarded as an intellectual tradition, not taught as disconnected, technical procedures in textbooks, but as an expanded exploration of problem solving.



Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited (HARYOU) Report

Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, Youth in the Ghetto: A study of consequences of powerlessness and a blueprint for change, 1964
 Harlem Youth Report, pamphlet from HARYOU in comic book form
 Dimensions variable
 Courtesy of the Kenneth Marshall Papers, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture Archives, Manuscripts & Rare Books Division



Map of Central Harlem, c 1960's
 Inkjet pigment print, color
 19 x 13 in.
 Reproduction. Image source: Public domain

On view here are rarely seen selections from the Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited (HARYOU). The first HARYOU report, titled *Youth in the Ghetto: A study of the consequences of powerlessness and a blueprint for change*, made data-driven,

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consciousness-raising recommendations on how to empower young Black people. The study was published in 1964 following the Harlem uprisings, five years before ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network)—the first public operational computer network—was launched as a state surveillance and intelligence project.

The HARYOU organization itself was founded in 1962 by psychologist Dr. Kenneth B. Clark and a selection of state officials, community organizers, and religious leaders. Clark and his wife and research partner Dr. Mamie Phipps Clark were the first Black people to obtain PhDs in psychology from Columbia University; they are widely known for their “doll tests” initiated in the 1940s as a means of studying the impact of segregation on Black children. Active in the Civil Rights Movement, the Clarks were called to testify as witnesses based on the material of their research findings in the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* case in 1954.

HARYOU had five focus points: Arts & Culture, Community Action, Employment, Education, and Special Programs. The organization received a grant of \$230,000 from New York City Mayor Robert F. Wagner and the Harlem Neighborhood Association (HANA). These funds supported eighteen months of research in Central Harlem with the core objective of reducing poverty and juvenile delinquency and amplifying Black pride. The data visualizations that functioned as documentation of HARYOU’s ongoing research took a myriad of forms, including comic books, which can be seen here. HARYOU’s affiliations with the Civil Rights Movement and Black nationalists brought them under surveillance by the NYPD Intelligence Division whose files contain detailed records of the organization, its initiatives, and its operations over time. These documents set forward a framework both for community change and set into context the ways in which the mission of HARYOU’s work positioned them as vulnerable to intensified state observation. Merging data visualization and civic engagement, HARYOU’s contributions mark a lineage that arcs forward to online platforms of Black digital empowerment such as HarlemLIVE.net founded in 1996 in New York City and active today, or the Central Los Angeles-based digital arts organization and narrative community web platform OnRamp Arts that ran from 1998 until its conclusion in 2004.



Candis Mosely Pettway (b. 1924, Gee’s Bend, AL; died 1997, Gee’s Bend, AL)

6 Columns, 2 Rows, c early 1970’s

Cotton

89 x 66 in.

Courtesy of Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

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Mattie Ross (b. 1902, Gee's Bend, AL; d. 1997, Selma, AL)

Sampler (from Freedom Quilting Bee), c early 1970s

Assorted fabrics, mostly cotton

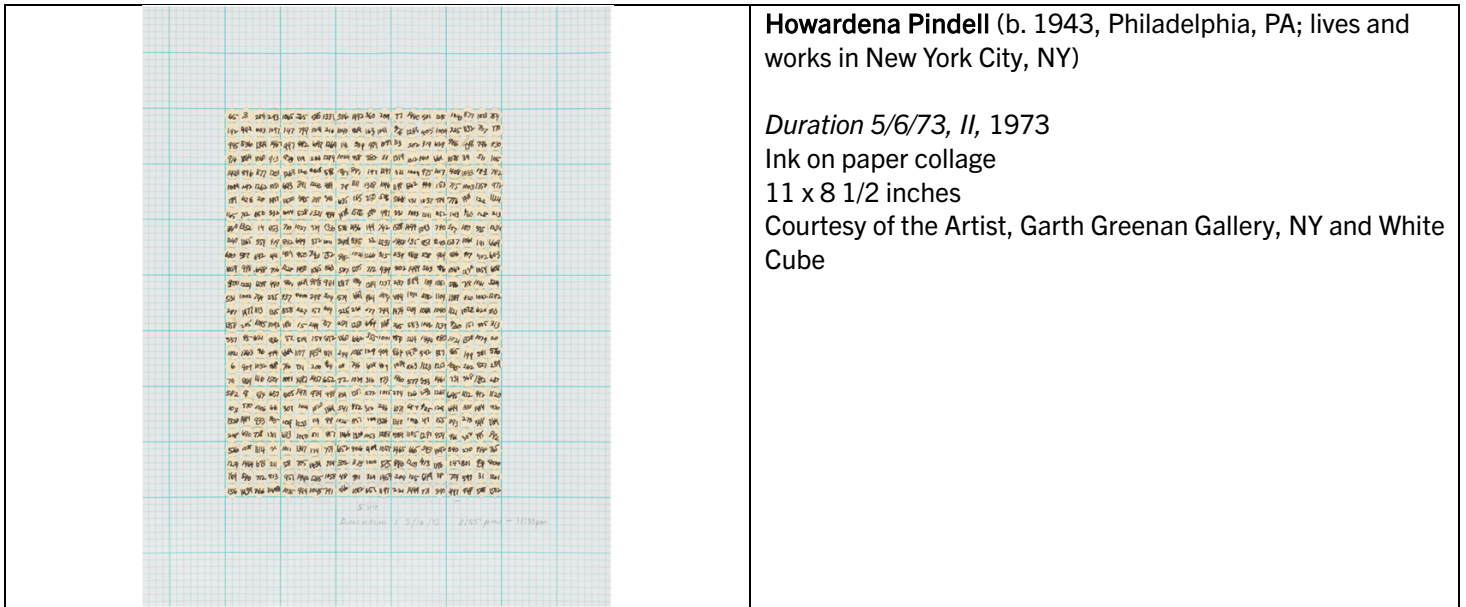
91 x 53 in.

Courtesy of Private Collection, New Haven, Connecticut
and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

The quilts on view represent the work of the Gee's Bend Quilters. The town of Boykin—also known as Gee's Bend—is an intimate African American community located at the arc of a bend of the Alabama River within Wilcox County, Alabama in the United States. The location was originally named for a landowner and slaveholder of the same surname who in 1816 settled in the area and built a cotton plantation. Many of the residents of the area are descendants of the enslaved people who worked on this plantation; therefore, they carry shared family names, such as Bendolph, Pettway, and Young. The formation of the quilting tradition of Gee's Bend rises out of the 19th and 20th century and carries on to present day where a vibrant network of collective quilters continues to grow and apply their creative practice. In the 1940s, the land of Boykin was sold in plots by the United States government to local families still living in the Bend. In a complex twist, this made it possible for the Black and Native residents of the area—once subject to the extractive labor and economic practices of enslavement and sharecropping—to gain ownership, in part, over the same land their families had once forcibly worked within. The quilts were originally produced for functional purposes and family use; the materials would often be repurposed or recycled, making each quilt produced a “heritage algorithm” and repository of archival information. Over time cooperatives such as The Freedom Quilting Bee (established in 1966 in Rehoboth, Alabama and remaining in operation until 2012) and the Gee's Bend Quilters Collective (established in 2003 and active today) were impactful in shaping an alternative economic model that allowed for the quilters to raise funds for their community. The Freedom Quilting Bee—for which Mattie Ross's work on view here is titled, given her participation—also played a key role in political consciousness-raising, active participants in the drives for voting rights and advocates within the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery. Over time, a dynamic dialogue surrounding their work has expanded to international acclaim and enduring critical resonance.

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Howardena Pindell (b. 1943, Philadelphia, PA; lives and works in New York City, NY)

Duration 5/6/73, II, 1973
 Ink on paper collage
 11 x 8 1/2 inches
 Courtesy of the Artist, Garth Greenan Gallery, NY and White Cube

Howardena Pindell’s expansive, decades-long career as an artist, curator, critic, activist, and educator has traversed numerous realms of practice—she studied painting at Boston University and Yale University, was the first Black woman curator accepted at the Museum of Modern Art from 1967–1979, and that same year began teaching at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, where she is still a professor. Pindell’s historic body of work ranges from her monumental, glittering abstract paintings, to her foundational video work *Free, White and 21* (1980), and her continued experimentations with color, acrylic, spray paint, paper, patterning, and collage. Her essays and curatorial vision have long pushed artists and art institutions to resist, and rise to the challenges of our time. “I saw numbers as a means of drawing... I called them nonsense numbers,” Pindell recalls, growing up observing her father, who was a mathematician and educator, write numbers and record statistics in a graph paper book. In graduate school, she began developing a visual language with dots, exploring holes, circles, and spheres within the media she was utilizing, and going as far as numbering and tallying each dot that built up the surface of a three dimensional collage, in sequence. Pindell remembers being intrigued by Lotto cards that had tiny little dots with circles that you could pick off to reveal if you had won a prize. Her experience with circles was also tied to a segregated U.S. South in the late 1940’s; she and her father visited a root beer stand in Kentucky where they were given mugs to drink from marked with a brown and red circle painted to indicate that they were segregated utensils. Years later in her artistic practice, it was through the use of the circle and the ellipse, and her formal interests in fragmentation and integration, that she turned to abstraction. *Duration 5/16/73, II* (1973) exemplifies how Pindell inscribed numbers onto hand-punched dots and then pasted them onto sheets of graph paper; the dots sit within the grid of squares, ordered but dense, figuring into a numerical algorithmic notation.



Ulysses Jenkins (b. 1946, Los Angeles, CA, lives and works in Los Angeles, CA)

Mass of Images, 1978
 4:15 minutes; black and white video, sound
 Courtesy of Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

The groundbreaking video and performance artist, Ulysses Jenkins, emerged in the late 1970's first as a painter. When video cameras were made widely available on the market, Jenkins began a profound engagement with television technology and broadcast. He integrated archival footage, photographs, image processing, and elegiac soundtracks to put together strands of thought interrogating race, gender, history, and state power. Around that same period, Jenkins founded Video Venice News, an L.A. media collective, and was involved with the artist group Studio Z (with David Hammons, Senga Nengudi, and Maren Hassinger), alongside his individual video and performance works with Othervisions Studio which explored the relationship between spoken word and lyrical content. In *Mass of Images* (1978) we see Jenkins holding up a sledgehammer (occasionally it sits in his lap) as he wheels himself around a room full of televisions. Interspersed on screen are racist images and stereotyping, such as actors in blackface, accompanied by his looping and confrontational refrain in voice-over, "You're just a mass of images you've gotten to know / from years and years of TV shows / The hurting thing; the hidden pain / was written and bitten into your veins / I don't and I won't relate / and I think for some it's too late!" Jenkins maintains his focus on television's capacity to circulate and inculcate these racist images, questioning how media, sound, and cultural iconography impact Black American identity and representation. Jenkins refers to this as "the image problem," or his emphasis on the origin of Blackness as external to itself. His direct-camera performance in blurred black-and-white film intercut with humming sound continues to represent a radical intervention on the medium; the video work is considered one of the first in the genre by a Black artist.



Milford Graves (b. 1941, Jamaica, Queens, NY; d. 2021, New York City, NY)

EKG Prints, 1978
 Ink on continuous printer paper
 Dimensions variable
 Courtesy of the Estate of Milford Graves © Estate of Milford Graves

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Milford Graves in his home, Jamaica Queens, NY, January 2018
Inkjet pigment print, color
Images (1–3): 18 x 23 in.
Photos by Andreas Laszlo Konrath
Reproduction. Images provided by Andreas Laszlo Konrath



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A pioneer of the experimental avant-garde Free Jazz movement as it continued to rise to prominence across the 1970s, Milford Graves was an innovative percussionist, acupuncturist, herbalist, martial artist, computer programmer, and professor of music. Across his lifetime, Graves studied heart rhythms and sonic vibrations as part of his ongoing scientific and creative practice. As an artist, he was inspired by holistic healing, the spirituality of African diasporic traditions ranging from West Africa to Haiti, and Chinese medicinal practice. In 1975 when Graves discovered heart recordings made by Dr. George David Geckler at Barnes & Nobles as part of a series of recordings intended to train those studying the body, Graves observed, "When I went home and listened to it, I could hear traditional African drum rhythms in heart sounds... These pathological heart sounds were like rhythms that a drummer gets into in a state of possession." As a faculty member at Bennington College for over forty years, the groundbreaking research labs that Graves hosted as part of the "Institute of Bio Creative Intuitive Music" made recordings via EKG (electrocardiogram) machines while classmates played improvised sounds both live and pre-recorded. Over decades, he collected and preserved this and other data, graphic illustrations of the electric relationship between body, machine, and sonic vibrations. Graves kept an eclectic studio space at his home in Queens wherein he used the engineering software LabVIEW as a means of delving further into his research of the music of the heart.



Blondell Cummings (b. 1944, Florence, SC; d. 2015, New York City, NY)

Commitment: Two Portraits, 1988

30 minutes; black and white video, sound; Dir Bernar Hébert

Courtesy of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts © Estate of Blondell Cummings

Blondell Cummings was an influential dancer, choreographer, and video artist in the downtown avant-garde scene in New York City throughout the 1970–1990s. Black mimetic gesture was central to Cummings's works, which were often improvised character studies of quotidian figures. Her movements speak to the shared somatic information, embodied knowledge and belonging amongst Black people and Black women in particular. Cummings's gestures are abstracted combinations of mime, sign language, and stop motion-like poses. Her dances are improvised exercises in embodied documentation, bearing movements that witness, tell stories, and display data. With a background and interest in filmmaking and photography, Cummings incorporated aspects of these mediums in her movement practice. She described it as "moving pictures"—emphasizing the visual and pictorial aspects of dance in works that feature fragmented gestural qualities combined to give dimension to a performance. The artist often collaged different performances together to create new meanings through relation and juxtaposition.

Commitment: Two Portraits (1988) was directed by Montrealer Bernar Hébert and was first shown on television as part of the PBS series, *Live From Off Center*. *Commitment* combines two improvised works by Cummings: *Chicken Soup* (1981) and "The Nun's Story," a segment from a larger work *Art of War/Nine Situations* (1984). *Chicken Soup* is Cummings's most famous work, and is a solo dance for camera following the story of a Black woman returning home to her kitchen after attending the funeral of her friend. The work is a study of Black domestic life and labor; we see Cummings sitting at her kitchen table, scrubbing the floor and cooking in a skillet inside a set sparse with props, responding to a voiceover narrated by the artist. "The Nun's Story" follows a Black nun at a tropical mission school that is the target of repeated violence. In this

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work, the set has a surrealist quality, where Cummings's gestures show the character in moments of care, prayer, and contemplation as she narrates a journal entry describing her experience. Both works are exemplary of Cummings's interest and investment in the everyday interior lives of Black women, which through her work becomes a rich emotional universe—a carrier of memory and meaning worthy of reverence and celebration.



Benjamin Patterson (b. 1934, Pittsburgh, PA; d. 2016, Wiesbaden, Germany)

Duo for Voice and a String Instrument performed during Kleines Sommerfest:

Après John Cage, Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, West Germany, June 9, 1962

Inkjet pigment print

14 1/2 x 18 3/5 in.

Reproduction. Image provided by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo credit: Peter Butler



Philip Corner's Piano Activities, performed by Philip Corner, George Maciunas, Emmett Williams, Benjamin Patterson, Dick Higgins, and Alison Knowles during Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Neuester Musik, Hörsaal des Städtischen Museums, Wiesbaden, Germany, September 1, 1962

Inkjet pigment print

13 4/5 x 17 8/9 in.

Reproduction. Image provided by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo credit: Peter Butler

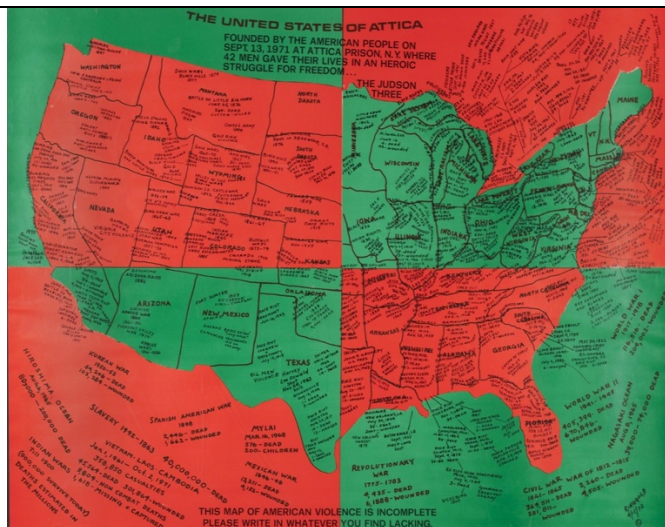
Benjamin Patterson was a renowned double-bassist and a co-founder of the Fluxus experimental art movement. Deriving from the Latin word *fluxus*—meaning “flowing”—the movement itself created space for artists across disciplines to shape experimental approaches to art via live, durational, and often interactive, performance events throughout the 1960's and 1970's. A refusal of consumerism, commercialism, abstract expressionism, and modernism, the Fluxus movement defined itself by creating spaces of inclusion inside of an “art world” that many artists at the time felt was becoming increasingly alienating socially, culturally, and economically to creative people. The launch of the Fluxus movement has been mapped

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back to the “FLuXuS Internationale FeSTsPiElE NEUESTER MUSiK” that took place in Wiesbaden, Germany in 1962. Patterson was part of the group that organized this inaugural festival, along with co-founder, Lithuanian American artist, George Maciunas. Maciunas in his *Fluxus Manifesto* (1963) calls for the movement to: “Promote a revolutionary flood and tide in art / Promote living art, anti-art / promote NON ART REALITY to be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals.” With a practice that encompassed what many Fluxus members termed “intermedia,” Patterson across the eight decades of his career, worked in a wide range of materials: paper, installation, video, sculpture, and performance. In conversation with Dutch new media and internet artist Constant Dullart in 2013, marking the 50th Anniversary of the Wiesbaden festival, Patterson considered the networked culture of the Fluxus tradition, observing: “Fluxus would have been easier if the internet had already been invented at that point. . . I think of it as the first truly international movement that functioned through the best means of communication at that point which was Air Mail. . . Fluxus was ready for the internet, [but] the internet had not arrived yet.” To-date, Patterson has been the only recorded and recognized Black member of the Fluxus movement.



Faith Ringgold (b. 1930, Harlem, New York City, NY; d. 2024, New York City, NY)

The United States of Attica, 1972

Offset lithograph

Composition and sheet: 21 5/8 × 27 3/8 in.

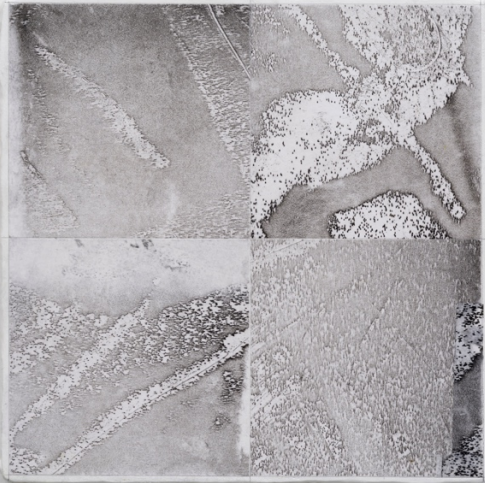
© 2024 Faith Ringgold / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Reproduction. Image provided by The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo credit: Peter Butler

In 1971, inmates at Attica Correctional Facility in New York staged one of the most important uprisings in abolitionist and American history, seeking better living conditions and political rights. Two weeks after the murder of prison activist and author, George Jackson, at San Quentin State Prison, approximately 1,281 of Attica’s 2,200 inmates rioted in a takeover of the prison, taking 42 members of its staff hostage. Authorities eventually agreed to 28 of the inmates’ demands, but not before 43 people lost their lives—10 employees and correctional officers, and 33 inmates. Between 1971–1972, visionary painter, writer, sculptor, educator, and activist, Faith Ringgold, created *The United States of Attica* (1971), a green, black, and red map that takes its colors from political leader and civil rights activist Marcus Garvey’s Black Nationalist Flag. Ringgold’s expansive conception of modernism, unperturbed by the inherited models of Western aesthetics, forged a fervent and new Black aesthetic marked by her explorations with light (her Black Light series eliminating white paint from her palette and white figures from her compositions), quilting, and storytelling techniques. Of the work, Ringgold said, “This map of American violence is incomplete—please write in whatever you find lacking.” The poster depicts a map of the United States noting Indigenous, slave, and immigrant uprisings and the dates and other details of acts of violence that occurred within each state (and, even instances of U.S. military imperialist violence abroad) since the late 1700s: racist violence, witch-hunts, assassinations, lynchings and other oppressive actions against Indigenous and Black and Brown people. Her laconic but capacious and visual use of language in *The United States of Attica* traces maps, and typifies violence, emphasizing its historical continuity, distribution, and ceaselessness as a genocidal and colonial project; two defining characteristics of the development of the United States.

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Jack Whitten (b. 1939, Bessemer, AL; d. 2018, New York, NY)

Xeroxed!, II, 1974

Rice paper and toner mounted on ply panel

11 1/2 x 11 1/2 in.

© Jack Whitten Estate. Courtesy the Estate and Hauser & Wirth

Jack Whitten was a painter and sculptor daring in his invention of new forms of abstraction and process throughout his nearly six-decade career. Whitten came of age in the segregated U.S. South, briefly studying medicine at the Tuskegee Institute before moving to New York in 1960 to study painting at the Cooper Union where he quickly found community with other Black artists such as Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, and Norman Lewis, and fell in with abstract expressionist artists, like Willem de Kooning. His experimental and inventive practice connected painting to photography, sculpture, printmaking, music, and new technologies, defying the boundaries between abstraction and representation. “For this technological age, abstraction is the language,” Whitten wrote, in his collection of writings *Notes from the Woodshed* (2018).

Whitten’s unique approach to the materiality of both texture and light understood that a synthesis between the two is grounded in movement. Rather than building up passages of paint, Whitten placed objects (wire, sheet metal, pebbles) beneath the canvas so that, when his wooden instruments were dragged across, negative shapes appeared as if in relief. During the 1970’s, he explored intersections between medium and the body differently, introducing innovative techniques of imaging that removed all gestural mark-making from his work to focus on mechanical automation. In 1974, Whitten received a grant from the Xerox Corporation which allowed him to manipulate the idea of dimensionality and space beyond the indexical trace, utilizing paper, toner, and the capacities of Xerox’s electrostatic printing technology. Whitten experimented with suspending toner in acrylic, and then applying it directly to canvas or to paper with a flat scraper blade, essentially “drawing” with the implement, and used heat lamps to set the images. The unconventional tools for drawings and paintings that Whitten used (carpenters saw blades and afro-combs) were given names like “processors,” or “developers” by the artist, reiterating the connections to gesture and photo-processing. Years later Whitten would affirm these sentiments, writing in his studio log in *Notes from the Woodshed* on May 17, 1994: “I am a digital expressionist.”

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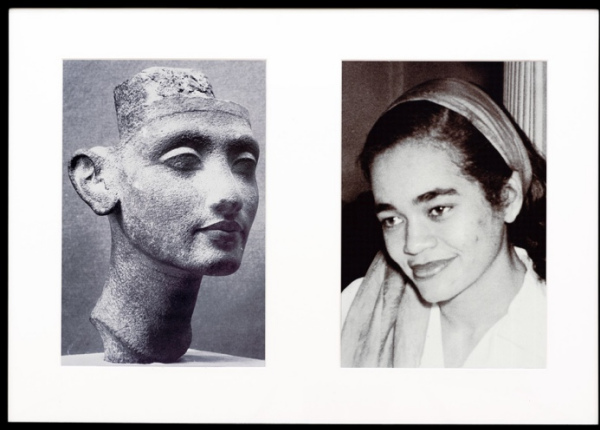
Lorraine O'Grady (b. 1934, Boston, MA; lives and works in New York City, NY)

Art Is..., 1983/2009

C-print, Edition of 8 plus 1 artist's proof (EC 1/2)

16 x 20 in.

Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim (Chicago, Paris, Mexico City) ©
 Lorraine O'Grady / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Lorraine O'Grady

Miscegenated Family Album (Young Queens), L: Nefertiti, age 24; R: Devon, age 24, 1980/1994

Cibachrome prints, Edition of 8 plus 3 artist's proof (EC 1/1)

26 x 37 in.

Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim (Chicago, Paris, Mexico City) ©
 Lorraine O'Grady / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Lorraine O'Grady refers to her practice as "writing in space," an apt entrypoint to understanding the artist's oeuvre as a literal manifestation of choreography, arcing to the Greek etymology: *khoreia*, meaning "dancing in unison" and *graphia* "writing." The artist's career, spanning nearly half a century and across a rich intersection of creative disciplines, keeps the written word, and the scores that follow, as central protagonists. They are characters that the artist spurs into action as collaborators, together shaping a cast of co-conspiring avatars and actors. O'Grady's foundational performance project *Art Is...* (1983/2009) that took place at Harlem's African-American Day Parade in September of 1983 applies this methodology directly. When the artist was challenged by the declaration of an acquaintance that "avant-garde art doesn't have anything to do with black people," O'Grady took up the task to illustrate otherwise—the streets of New York City as her inspiration and algorithm.

In the midst of the throngs of people celebrating their Blackness at the parade, O'Grady traveled with fifteen actors and dancers who, all dressed in white, posed for images with Harlem passersby holding gold picture frames. The group was also accompanied by a 9 x 15 foot gilded antique-styled frame mounted atop a gold-skirted float that, in traveling along Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard, framed all it passed, completing the proposition of "Art is..." with "Harlem" definitively, with all its creative vibrance and rich history. In reflecting on the work, the artist recalls the people in the parade shouting, "We're the art!" O'Grady challenges the framework both of who belongs within the tradition of representation within art history, and what shape a creative institution can take when Blackness itself, viral in its global position, becomes institutionalized. By using gold frames typified within a canonized idea of museums as institutional settings, bringing Black people "into view" via

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the lines of the frame's visual edit, the artist makes plain the stark contrast of who is seen versus who is rendered invisible within the vast landscape of visual culture.

In O'Grady's intimate series *Miscegenated Family Album* (1980/1994) the artist again reclaims the frame, this time deploying the diptych as a visual strategy and technique. This format exemplifies the artist's emblematic "Both/And" approach. As a concept, "Both/And" rejects the binary of "either/or" and instead offers an endless interconnectivity across multiple layers, logics, and planes. The installation consists of 16 diptychs from 65 paired images. These 65 diptychs first appeared in O'Grady's 1980 performance titled *Nefertiti/Devonia Evangeline*. Pairing her late sister Devonia Evangeline and Queen Nefertiti, who had both died prematurely, the diptych slides projected a sequential narrative as O'Grady performed a disjointed and sometimes comically failed ritual to return the two to life. When she left the stage, a diptych of two sarcophagi remained. The work has been exhibited internationally, bringing the private and cherished "family album" and the tensions prompted by the complex histories of racial mixing across Black diasporas into new social and cultural contexts and coding. O'Grady writes, "The female body in the West is not a unitary sign. Rather, like a coin, it has an obverse and a reverse: on the one side, it is white; on the other, non-white or, prototypically, black." Through these two bodies of work the artist instructs the viewer to extend beyond a binary Western and Eurocentric readership of the Black form, complicating assumptions surrounding Black heritage and identity and the porous boundaries these histories traverse as they move through and beyond the technologies that hold them.



Marion Stokes (b. 1929, Germantown, Philadelphia, PA; d. 2012, Philadelphia, PA)

Input #7 The Anatomy of Violence, Part 6 – Genocide [1" tape], 1968

58:50 minutes; color video, sound; Dir Don Matticks
Courtesy of the Marion Stokes Movies, Audio & Video
Collection; Internet Archive



Marion Stokes

Input #30 Black Reparations, Part 1 [1" tape], 1969
58:39 minutes; color video, sound; Dir George Jason
Courtesy of the Marion Stokes Movies, Audio & Video
Collection; Internet Archive

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reportage, and to ensure that facts across multiple lines of reporting could be safeguarded and cross-referenced in the future.

Across her lifetime Stokes accumulated approximately 71,000 tapes; these were stored within nine separate apartments she purchased for the sole purpose of housing these materials. Stokes was as interested in the practice of conserving history as she was committed to deepening her knowledge of technology, growing a collection of nearly 200 Apple computers. To support the storage and preservation of her archive, Stokes became an early investor in Apple Inc. While she was an established technologist, Stokes—who was surveilled by the U.S. government because of her devoted political life—also actively resisted modes of communication and exchange that might have amplified her digital footprint: she did not send emails. In the wake of her passing in 2013, the Internet Archive began digitizing her tape collection after being gifted the archive by Stokes's family. The recordings made by Stokes have been recognized as the only known collection of preserved media broadcast for this period and provide a pioneering blueprint for contemporary media platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo, and Twitch.



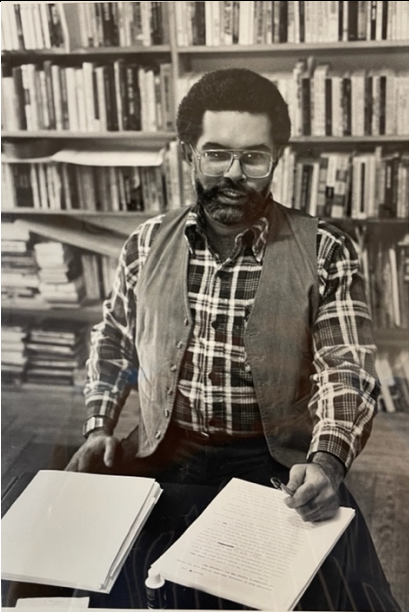
Octavia E. Butler (b. 1947, Pasadena, CA; d. 2006, Lake Forest Park, WA)

Octavia Butler photograph, c 1980's
Gelatin silver print, black and white
10 x 8 in.

Courtesy of The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division; Octavia Butler Photographs Collection

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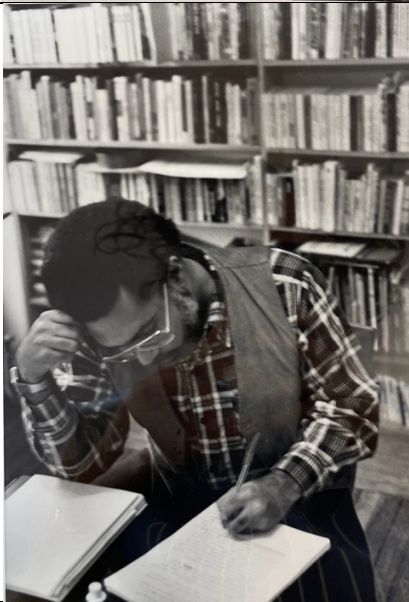
Samuel R. Delany (b. 1942, Harlem, New York City; lives and works New York City, NY)

Samuel R. Delany portraits, c 1980s

Gelatin silver print, black and white

Images (1–2): 8 x 7 in.

Courtesy of The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division; Samuel R. Delany Portrait Collection



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Samuel R. Delany and Octavia Butler photograph, c 1980s
 Gelatin silver print, black and white
 10 x 9 in.
 Courtesy of The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division; Schomburg Photographs Collection

Hailed as the “mother of Afrofuturism,” Octavia E. Butler is an award-winning pioneering science fiction writer and author of thirteen books during her lifetime. On her motivations in creating space for Black characters Butler once noted, “I wrote myself in, since I’m me and I’m here and I’m writing. I can write my own stories and I can write myself in.” The worlds Butler explored via her fiction shape an idea of a Black future where the relationship between humans, “superhumans,” and machines are often inextricably intertwined. Butler’s model of futurity proposes a Blackness that defies space and time and refuses traditional archetypes of gender and sexuality. As a writer, she has had an indelible imprint on art, culture, and society, setting forward a framework of what an Afrofuturist model could look like, both on and off the page.

While writer and critic, Mark Dery, is widely credited for coining the term *Afrofuturism* in 1993 in his essay *Black to the Future*. Afrofuturism across generations—before, through, and beyond the coining of the term itself—has become a lens through which to view and explore intersections of Black history and technocultures. In 1998, scholar Alondra Nelson founded the Afrofuturism Listserv, an electronic mailing list where academics such as Alexander Weheliye and artists such as DJ Spooky (Paul D. Miller) convened via the internet to dialogue around the topic of a networked and distributed Blackness as intertwined with, and mediated by, digital technology. Butler was also a longtime friend of the Harlem-born Samuel Delany. Author of over 40 books, Delany’s memoirs and fiction brings together a queer fabulist technoscience vision. His future is one that subverts power structures, resists heteronormativity, challenges gender, and engages questions of Black and queer humanity in the face of catastrophe, erasure, ecological crisis, or extinction.



George Lewis (b. 1952, Chicago, IL; lives and works in New York City, NY)

The Evolution of George Lewis's Voyager System, 2024
 21:33 minutes, color video, sound
 Video production: Laboratory for Experimental Museology, École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), Switzerland, 2024. Created for the exhibition *Musica ex Machina: Machines Thinking Musically*, EPFL Pavilions, Lausanne.
 Courtesy of the artist

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George Lewis at STEIM (Studio for Electro-Instrumental Music), Amsterdam, 1985

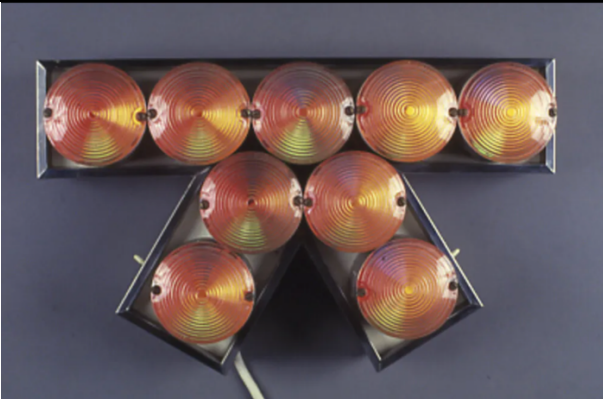
Inkjet pigment print; black and white
10 x 14 in.

Kristina Andersen, Michel Waisvisz Archives
Reproduction. Image provided by the artis

George Lewis is one of the most visionary figures in modern music: a composer, performer, and scholar of experimental music renowned as an improvising trombonist, a computer–music pioneer, professor of American music at Columbia University, and a fixture in the Black avant-garde Chicago collective known as the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. Lewis’s compositions are highly conceptualized, inviting as much complexity as improvisation (there’s often no written notation) and play. His scholarship expands the canon of experimental composition, positioning the rich history of Black musical traditions at the forefront. “So many of us have been written out of these histories of contemporary music. But we can write ourselves back in,” Lewis says. Between 1980–1982, Lewis was the music director at The Kitchen, New York City’s center for experimental art and the avant-garde since 1971. He carried the influence of the AACM into the experimental home he nurtured within the walls of The Kitchen, before moving to Paris to work at IRCAM (Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustics/Music), the French composer and conductor, Pierre Boulez’s lavishly funded electronic-music studio in 1982.

Throughout the late 1980’s, Lewis defied the prevailing Eurocentrism of Modern music, programming Apple computers to react to live sonic input and deliver improvisatory responses. Lewis’s project *Voyager*, conceived between 1986–1988, continued his exploration of interactive computer music that continues into the present. “*Voyager* is a nonhierarchical, interactive musical environment that privileges improvisation,” Lewis writes in his essay *Too Many Notes: Complexity and Culture in Voyager* (2000). He describes *Voyager*’s unusual amalgamation of improvisation, indeterminacy, empathy and the logical, utterly systematic structure of the computer program (impulses that all collectively and individually articulate both personal narrative and difference in performance), not only as an environment but as a “program,” a “system” and a “composition,” in the musical sense of the term. Integrated as an interactive human–and–machine software, his system enacts the density and multiplicity that has long characterized Afro–diasporic music–making and poetics: “Musical computer programs, like any texts, are not objective or universal, but instead represents the particular ideas of their creators,” Lewis says, “thus, it’s useful to examine the implications of the experience of programming and performing with *Voyager* as a kind of computer music-making embodying African-American musical, aesthetic, and cultural practice.”

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Tom Lloyd (b. 1929, Jamaica, Queens, NY; d. 1996, Mastic Beach, NY)

Narokan, 1965
 Aluminum, light bulbs, and plastic laminate. Sculpture: 11 1/2 x 18 1/2 x 5 in.
 The Studio Museum in Harlem; gift of Mr. and Mrs. Darwin K. Davidson



Tom Lloyd and apprentices in the artist's studio in Jamaica, Queens, c 1968
 Inkjet pigment print, black and white
 36 x 24 in.
 Courtesy The Studio Museum in Harlem Archives. Photo by Reginald McGhee



Tom Lloyd standing in front of *Veleuro*, 1968
 Inkjet pigment print, color
 14.5 x 16 in.
 Courtesy The Studio Museum in Harlem Archives

Tom Lloyd was an artist, activist, and community organizer who worked primarily in abstraction and technology to create electronically programmed light works. In 1968, Lloyd was selected as the inaugural artist for the Studio Museum in Harlem's Studio Program—one of the Museum's founding initiatives, now known as the *Artist-in-Residence* program. The Studio Museum's inaugural exhibition, *Electronic Refractions II*, opened on September 24, 1968 as a solo presentation of Lloyd's electronically programmed light sculptures. *Narokan* is one of his earliest sculptures, using everyday objects such as Christmas light bulbs, plastic Buick headlight covers, and industrial materials provided by engineers at the major electronics company Radio Corporation of America (RCA). Lloyd, one of the first artists to work in and with light, was interested in how

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electric lights were used to communicate within daily life across New York City: television, traffic signals, car headlights, Broadway theater marquees. The work defied expectations as a departure from figurative Black art. “Scientists invent new materials every day and I think artists should take advantage of this new technology,” Lloyd said, “light is in its infancy and has all kinds of possibilities. . . we communicate by light; refraction means controlling, bending, and manipulating light.”

A few months before the opening, Lloyd participated in the 1968 round-table discussion, *The Black Artist in America: A Symposium*, with artists Richard Hunt, Jacob Lawrence, Hale Woodruff, Sam Gilliam, Romare Bearden, and T. Williams. The conversation reveals Lloyd’s investment in both pedagogy and social action, what scholar Krista Thompson calls “the art of Black study” or Lloyd’s engagement with study as a site, tactic, and medium to center Black and Puerto Rican art within institutions. “If art is indeed a creative process which involves the conscious and unconscious mind and soul, then who can assess the intrinsic value, channel and determine the growth of Black artists and critics themselves?” asked Lloyd, in the introduction to *Black Art Notes*, a collection of eight essays Black artists conceived as a critical response to the *Contemporary Black Artists in America* exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, edited and published by the artist in 1971. The same year Lloyd founded the Store Front Museum in Queens, NY, a cultural institution that hosted exhibitions, lectures, concerts, and festivals, as well as other forms of cultural programs for the community, until 1988.