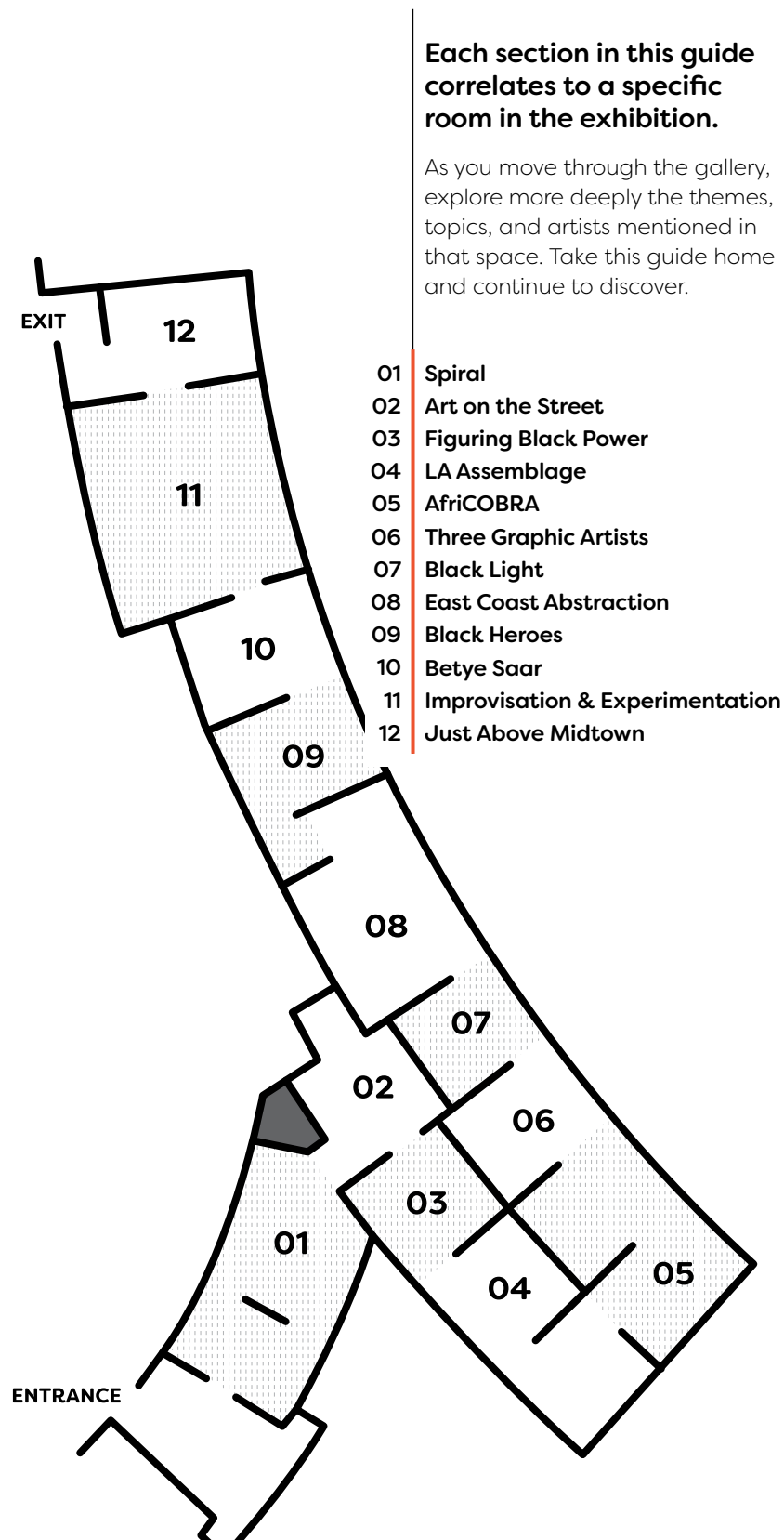


SOUL of a NATION GUIDE

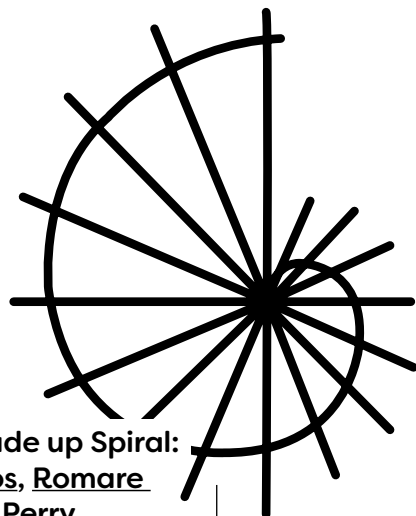
FEBRUARY 3 - APRIL 23, 2018



The civil rights movement that took place in the United States during the time period covered in *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* involved not just a handful of inspiring leaders, but thousands of often unnamed individuals.

The movement was, in fact, many movements for integration, justice, equal rights, and empowerment and against white supremacy, violence, and prejudice. While we can't name every individual, significant event, or work of art involved, this guide will provide some background to the cultural movements taking place during the time period, and a framework for understanding how some artists featured in *Soul of a Nation* chose to respond.

Visit CrystalBridges.org for more information and additional sources. Recommended readings, music, or art may not be suitable for all ages.

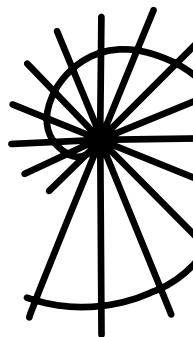


Fifteen artist members made up Spiral: Charles Alston, Emma Amos, Romare Bearden, Calvin Douglass, Perry Ferguson, Reginald Gammon, Felrath Hines, Alvin Hollingsworth, Norman Lewis, William Majors, Richard Mayhew, Earl Miller, Merton Simpson, Hale Woodruff, and James Yeargans.

The following are excerpts from a roundtable discussion among members of the Spiral group in which they discussed “the contradictions facing them in modern America.” The discussion was led by Jeanne Siegal and published in the September, 1966, edition of ARTnews.

In her introduction, **Siegal** writes that Spiral members “... knew that something set them apart from other painters, but they weren’t sure if that ‘something’ had a tangible form that could be transmitted through art.”

Romare Bearden: I suggest that Western society, and particularly that of America, is gravely ill and a major symptom is the American treatment of the Negro. The artistic expression of this culture concentrates on themes of “absurdity” and “anti-art” which provide further evidence of its ill health. It is the right of everyone now to re-examine history to see if Western culture offers the only solutions to man’s purpose on this earth.



Romare Bearden, *Pittsburgh Memory*, 1964, mixed media collage of printed papers and graphite on board. 8 1/2" x 11 3/4". Collection of halley k harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld, New York, NY.

Perry Ferguson: I suggest that there is no such thing in America as Negro Art.

Alvin Hollingsworth: I wonder why it should be necessary to seek one particular image. Even the exponents of Pop Art paint in divergent ways....



Norman Lewis, *America the Beautiful*, 1960, oil on canvas, 50" x 64", signed. From the Collection of Tonya Lewis Lee and Spike Lee. © Estate of Norman W. Lewis; Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.

“Our group should always point to a broader purpose and never be led down an alley of frustration. Political and social aspects should not be the primary concern; esthetic ideas should have preference. Is there a Negro Image?”

NORMAN LEWIS

Hale Woodruff: Should Spiral continue? Is the purpose of Spiral to exploit the fact that we are Negroes—in order to get shows? Or do we believe as artists that we have something valid, together, as a group? We come together after all, because we see conditions and we face problems.

Ultimately there was no consensus. **Siegal** concludes: “They shared the discovery that in general, the attempt to express their feelings as Negroes through an art of ‘social protest’ was ineffective if not impossible. They also recognized that, at least in this one effort, there was no evidence of any such thing as a Negro quality or a Negro art...”

ART ON THE STREET

02

THE WALL OF RESPECT

The Wall of Respect in Chicago was an influential mural project by the artist collective Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC). The group depicted Black heroes for the mural, which went through several versions from 1967 to 1971, when the building was torn down. Below shows the artists initially involved and the heroes they chose.

Religion by William Walker & Robert A. Sengstacke

Nat Turner, Elijah Muhammad, Albert Cleage, Wyatt Tee Walker, Girls in Church, Spiritual Grace

Literature by Edward Christmas & Darryl Cowherd

W.E.B. Du Bois, John Oliver Killens, Gwendolyn Brooks, James Baldwin, Lerone Bennet, Ronald Fair, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka)

Rhythm & Blues by Wadsworth Jarrell & Billy Abernathy

Muddy Waters, Billie Holiday, Dinah Washington, Ray Charles, James Brown, Smokey Robinson, Aretha Franklin, The Marvelettes, Stevie Wonder

Statesmen by Norman Parish & Roy Lewis

Marcus Garvey, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown

Athletes by Myrna Weaver & Florence Hawkins

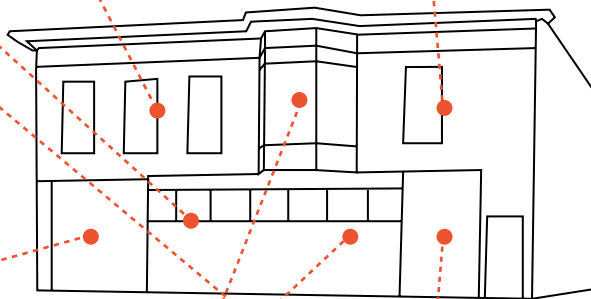
Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, Jim Brown, Muhammad Ali, Lew Alcindor (Kareem Abdul-Jabbar)

Jazz by Jeff Donaldson, Elliot Hunter, & Billy Abernathy

Thelonius Monk, Charlie Parker, Charles Mingus, Sarah Vaughan, Max Roach, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Elvin Jones, Eric Dolphy, Ornette Coleman, Sonny Rollins, Nina Simone

Theatre by Barbara Jones-Hogu & Roy Lewis

Claudia McNeil, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Cicely Tyson, Oscar Brown Jr., Sidney Poitier, James Earl Jones, Dick Gregory, Darlene Blackburn



“Curiosity seekers, uneasy tourists, art lovers and political activists of every stripe congregated daily and in ever-increasing numbers. Musicians played as the work proceeded. Writers recited their works. . . . Dancers danced, singers sang, and the air was charged with camaraderie and pioneering confidence. Before the Wall was finished on August 24, 1967, it already had become a shrine to black creativity dubbed the “Great Wall of Respect” . . . a rallying point for revolutionary rhetoric and calls to action, and a national symbol of the heroic black struggle for liberation.”

JEFF DONALDSON, DESCRIBING THE SCENE AT THE WALL OF RESPECT

FIGURING BLACK POWER

03

BLACK POWER & THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

In the late 1960s, Black Power became a compelling force that galvanized artists and activists. The Black Arts Movement (BAM) was an umbrella term for artists like Benny Andrews, Kay Brown, Elizabeth Catlett, and many others in this exhibition who embraced the idea of creating art specifically for Black people. Gestures like the raised fist alongside symbols like the American flag indicate that the nation fell short in the promises of freedom and opportunity for everyone.

BAM principally manifested itself in literature and theatre and was symbolically born when poet Amiri Baraka moved from Manhattan to Harlem in 1965 where he started Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BARTS). He envisioned BARTS as an arts school responsive to the Black community and rooted in the place of the Harlem Renaissance.

Although BARTS operated for less than a year, it inspired dozens of similar Black Arts endeavors across the US, including literary publications like Black Fire, theatres and acting companies like Ebony Showcase Theatre, and writers' collectives like the Watts Writers' Workshop, just to name a few.



Screenwriter Budd Schulberg (center) conducts a session of the NEA-supported Watts Writers' Workshop. Photo: *Los Angeles Times* from National Endowment for the Arts.



Elizabeth Catlett, *Black Unity*, 1968, cedar, 21 in. x 12 1/2 in. x 23 in. Photography by Edward C. Robison III.

“The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. *This movement is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America.* In order to perform this task, the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the Western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology. The Black Arts and the Black Power concept both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood. . . . A main tenet of Black Power is the necessity for Black people to define the world in their own terms. The Black artist has made the same point in the context of aesthetics.”

LARRY NEAL, 1968



Melvin Edwards, *Some Bright Morning*, 1963, welded steel, 14.50 x 9.30 x 5 in. Courtesy the artist and Alexander Gray Associates, New York. © Melvin Edwards/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Many Black artists responded to the oppression and injustices African Americans were facing through their artwork in an effort to bring about change.

The Los Angeles Watts Rebellion was the culmination of generations of social, economic, and political injustice against Black citizens. The city erupted into six days of riots after an August 11, 1965 incident in which a white policeman arrested a young African American motorist for suspicion of driving while intoxicated. Tensions boiled over police discrimination, resulting in the mobilization of 14,000 California National Guard troops, 34 people killed, more than 1,000 reported injuries, almost 4,000 arrests, and \$40 million in property damage. Officials failed to act after the investigation.

Afterward, many artists took it upon themselves to restore their community. They created art from objects found in the urban environment and drew upon their passion for working with and for the public.



Fig. 1 Noah Purifoy in front of a photographic installation of the Watts rebellion. Los Angeles, c. 1966. Photo: Harry Drinkwater.

Although **Melvin Edwards** studied in LA, he moved to New York in 1963 where he took on large public commissions. He was interested in using abstraction as an answer to social injustice and joined the mural-painting collective *Smokehouse* to paint geometric murals on walls of public spaces and residential buildings.

John Outterbridge taught at the Compton Communicative Arts Academy and the Watts Towers Arts Center and then became director. He also worked at Pasadena Art Museum as an art installer, exposing him to the work of Mark di Suvero, Robert Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol—artists who also experimented with materials.

Noah Purifoy cofounded the Watts Towers Arts Center in 1964, serving as its first director. After the Rebellion, Purifoy collaborated with others for the traveling exhibition *66 Signs of Neon* which consisted of individual assemblages made from the wreckage. In the mid 1970s, Purifoy joined the California Arts Council to design and fund new art programs for the state.

Betye Saar dealt with stereotypes of race and femininity in her work. She started as a social worker and designer. Perhaps her most well-known piece, *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, was made to empower Aunt Jemima and “to make her a warrior,” as Saar said.

AfriCOBRA, based in Chicago in the late 1960s, was one of the few organized groups at this time that tried to explain their group aesthetic in writing.

The following is an excerpt from the Manifesto, “10 in Search of a Nation,” written by Jeff Donaldson and first published in *Black World*, 1970.

... Among our roots and branches we have selected these qualities to emphasize in our image-making—

(A) the expressive awesomeness that one experiences in African art and life in the U.S.A. like the Holiness church (which is about as close to home as we are in this country) and the demon that is the blues, Alcindor’s dunk and Sayer’s cut, the Hip walk and the Together talk.

(C) symmetry that is free, repetition with change, based on African music and African movement. The rhythm that is easy syncopation and very very human. Uncontracted. The rhythm the rhythm the rhythm rhythm rhythm. . . .

(B) This is a big one . . . Shine—a major quality, a major quality. We want the things to shine, to have the rich luster of a just-washed ‘Fro, of spitshined shoes, of de-ashed elbows and knees and noses. The Shine who escaped the Titanic, the “li’l light of mine,” patent leather, Dixie Peach, Bar-BQ, fried fish, cars, ad shineum!

(Z) Color color Color color that shines, color that is free of rules and regulations. Color that shines. Color that is expressively awesome. Color that defines, identifies and directs. Superreal color for Superreal images. The superreality that is our every day all day thang. Color as bright and as real as the color dealing on the streets of Watts and the Southside and 4th street and in Roxbury and in Harlem, in Abidjian, in Port-au-Prince, Bahia and Ibadan, in Dakar and Johannesburg and everywhere we are. Coolade colors for coolade images for superreal people. Superreal images for SUPERREAL people....



Fig. 2 AfriCOBRA poster, 1970



Carolyn Lawrence, *Black Children Keep Your Spirits Free*, 1972, acrylic on canvas, 49 x 51 x 2 in. Carolyn Mims Lawrence. Image courtesy of the artist.

Black artists were rarely given the same space and attention as white artists in the 1960s and '70s. Although *Three Graphic Artists* was an exhibition in a mainstream institution (Los Angeles County Museum of Art), the artwork by David Hammons, Timothy Washington, and Charles White was sequestered in a small gallery within the museum.

The following quotes are excerpts from the 1971 exhibition catalog about the artists' work in their own words:

Charles White



Fig. 4 Charles White in his Los Angeles Studio, 1970.

“My work takes shape around images and ideas that are centered within the vortex of a black life experience, a nitty-gritty ghetto experience resulting in contradictory emotions: anguish, hope, love, despair, happiness, faith, lack of faith, dreams. Yet stubbornly holding on to an elusive romantic belief that the people of this land cannot always be insensible to the dictates of justice or deaf to the voice of humanity.”

David Hammons



Fig. 5 David Hammons in his Los Angeles Studio, 1970. *Pray for America*, 1969, is shown at his left, and a portion of *Wine Leading the Wine*, c. 1969, is shown at his right.

Timothy Washington



Fig. 3 Timothy Washington at *Three Graphic Artists*, 1971.

“I am dealing with message art: it is informative and relates to a poster in that it gives information. However, I want the information to be discovered; therefore the message is subtle. I try to ask questions and make the viewer think and in turn look closer. . . . I am not trying to change society but create an awareness, because awareness can curb or change reactions in the future.”

“I feel that my art relates to my total environment—my being a black, political, and social human being. Although I am involved with communicating with others, I believe that my art itself is really my statement. For me it has to be.”

FOCUS ON ROY DECARAVA

Roy DeCarava is known for the rich, dark tones in his photographs, and is seen as one of the first well-known African American fine-art photographers, capturing forms of his neighborhood with black-and-white film.

Looking at his photographs, what do you see? His images are purposeful; unlike the filter effects on phone cameras many of us use today, they required a lot of skill on the part of the photographer, both with manipulating his camera and using the darkroom.

“A photograph is a photograph, a picture, an image, an illusion complete within itself, depending neither on words, reproductive processes or anything else for its life, its reason for being.”

ROY DECARAVA

Roy DeCarava, *Five men*, 1964, gelatin silver print on paper, 11 x 14 in. Courtesy Sherry DeCarava and the Decarava Archives. © 2017 Estate of Roy DeCarava. All Rights Reserved.



Find examples of the elements listed below. Why do you think DeCarava chooses to use these visual features?

Close-cropping » DeCarava framed people close up, focusing directly on their expressions to create an intimate portrait of people in a crowd or famous personalities.

No faces » Sometimes DeCarava's photographs of people focus on a motion or gesture with their faces obscured.

Out of focus or grainy » DeCarava may be challenging the viewer to see in a different way when a clear image is unavailable.

Dark tones » While other photographers commonly try to lighten images or increase their contrast, DeCarava is best known for embracing dark tones.

Abstracted objects and buildings » DeCarava's images of buildings and objects on the street are almost like abstract paintings, focusing principally on form and line. By doing so, he also plays with scale.



Roy DeCarava, *Staircase tracks and doorway*, c. 1965, gelatin silver print on paper, 11 x 14 in. Courtesy Sherry DeCarava and the Decarava Archives. © 2017 Estate of Roy DeCarava. All Rights Reserved.

After going through this exhibition, take a photo on your camera inspired by DeCarava's style.

*I Know Why the
Caged Bird Sings*

Maya Angelou

1969, AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Gorilla, My Love

**Toni Cade
Bambara**

1972, SHORT STORIES

*The Fire Next
Time*

James Baldwin

1963, ESSAYS

Meridian

Alice Walker

1976, NOVEL

"It's Nation Time"

Amiri Baraka

FORMERLY KNOWN AS
(LeRoi Jones)

1970, POEM

Dutchman

Amiri Baraka

FORMERLY KNOWN AS
(LeRoi Jones)

1964, PLAY

Five Plays

Ed Bullins

1969, PLAYS

*I Am A Black
Woman*

Mari Evans

1970, POEMS

Kindred

Octavia Butler

1979, NOVEL

Soul on Ice

Eldridge Cleaver

1968, ESSAYS

SUGGESTED READING

The Black Arts Movement became a loose term encompassing writers who focused primarily on Black subjects and the Black experience. The following is a reading list of selected poems, plays, and prose from writers of the time, yet not all are directly aligned with the Black Arts Movement.

In the Mecca

**Gwendolyn
Brooks**

1968, POEMS

Re: Creation

Nikki Giovanni

1970, POEMS

*Funnyhouse of
a Negro*

Adrienne Kennedy

1964, PLAY

Poems from Prison

**Etheridge
Knight**

1968, POEMS

The Vulture

Gil-Scott Heron

1970, NOVEL

*Roots: The Saga
of an American
Family*

Alex Haley

1976, NOVEL

The Bluest Eye

Toni Morrison

1970, NOVEL

Homecoming

Sonia Sanchez

1969, POEMS

"for colored girls
who have consid-
ered suicide /
when the rainbow
is enuf"

Ntozake Shange

1976, CHOREOPOEM

Don't Cry, Scream

Haki R. Madhubuti
FORMERLY KNOWN AS
(Don L. Lee)

1969, POEMS

*The Man Who
Cried I Am*

**John Alfred
Williams**

1967, NOVEL

*A Secretary to the
Spirits, illustrated
by Betye Saar*

Ishmael Reed

1978, POEMS

Songhai

Askia Toure

1972, POEMS

SOUL OF A NATION PLAYLISTS

Visit the Crystal Bridges Spotify channel
to listen to the complete lists.

[CRYSTALBRIDGES.ORG](https://www.crystalbridges.org)

The Greats PLAYLIST

This playlist is inspired by the figures depicted on the Wall of Respect and popular music at the time, as well as songs and poems from people aligned with the civil rights and Black Power movements. Black creatives were forging a path in a variety of art forms and making a huge mark on music.

PART I

"Summertime / Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child"	Mahalia Jackson
"I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man"	Muddy Waters
"Strange Fruit"	Billie Holiday
"This Bitter Earth"	Dinah Washington
"What'd I Say," Pt. 1 & II	Ray Charles
"Respect"	Aretha Franklin
"Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud"	James Brown
"Please Mr. Postman"	The Marvelettes
"I Second That Emotion"	Smokey Robinson
"Uptight (Everything's Alright)"	Stevie Wonder
"I Hear a Symphony"	The Supremes
"(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay"	Otis Redding
"A Change is Gonna Come"	Sam Cooke

PART II

"Mississippi Goddam"	Nina Simone
"Fleurette Africaine (African Flower)"	Duke Ellington
"Now's The Time"	Charlie Parker Quartet
"Fables of Faubus"	Charles Mingus
"All Africa"	Abbey Lincoln
"Daahoud"	Max Roach Quintet
"Alabama"	John Coletrane
"Round About Midnight"	Thelonious Monk
"Free"	Ornette Coleman
"Black Coffee"	Sarah Vaughan
"Freddie Freeloader"	Miles Davis
"Dear John C."	Elvin Jones
"Something Sweet, Something Tender"	Eric Dolphy
"St. Thomas"	Sonny Rollins
"Clarrise"	J. Sharps, Pan Afrikan Peoples Arkestra
"Freedom Monday"	Art Blakey (Abdullah Ibn Buhaina) & The Jazz Messengers

PART III

"Seize the Time"	Elaine Brown
"Beverly Hills Chicago"	Gwendolyn Brookes
"So This is Our Revolution"	Sonia Sanchez
"Listen to Big Black at S.F. State"	Sonia Sanchez
"Dope"	Amiri Baraka
"I See Chano Pozo"	Jane Cortez & The Firespitters

Improvisation & Experimentation

PLAYLIST

At the same time artists were experimenting with forms, structure, color, process, and materials, musicians were also expanding the limits of sound in both popular music and jazz. Free jazz, funk, and soul celebrated improvisation, skill, and collaboration, while also playing with genres and commenting on present-day issues.

PART I

"Living for the City"	Stevie Wonder
"Mothership Connection (Star Child)"	Parliament
"Miss Black America"	Curtis Mayfield
"What's Going On"	Marvin Gaye
"Ghetto: Misfortune's Wealth"	24 Carat Black
"Put a Little Love in Your Heart"	Gladys Knight & The Pips
"Hyperbolic syllables squared al ymistic"	Isaac Hayes
"Skin I'm In"	Sly & The Family Stone
"Am I Black Enough for You?"	Billy Paul
"Ball of Confusion (What's What the World Is Today)"	The Temptations
"Red, Black & Green"	Roy Ayers
"Proud Mary"	Ike & Tina Turner
"Use Me"	Bill Withers
"I'm a Ram"	Al Green
"Attica Blues"	Archie Shepp
"Atomic Dog"	George Clinton
"She Works Hard for the Money"	Donna Summer
"Love, that's America"	Melvin Van Peebles
"Art Groupie"	Grace Jones
"Unity Party Jam"	Kurtis Blow
"Hard Times"	Run-D.M.C.

PART II

"The Revolution Will Not Be Televised"	Gil Scot-Heron
"Space is the Place"	Sun Ra
"Pharoah's Dance"	Miles Davis
"Watts Happening"	The Jazz Crusaders
"Hum-Allah-Hum-Al-lah-Hum-Allah"	Pharoah Sanders
"Black Is"	The Last Poets
"Universal Consciousness"	Alice Coltrane
"Liberator Of The Spirit—For John Coletrane"	Kamau Daaood
"Horacio"	R. Miranda, Pan Afrikan People's Arkestra
"King (dedicated To Duke Ellington)"	Muhai Richard Abrams
"Dark Day"	Fred Anderson Quartet
"N508-10 (4G)"	Anthony Braxton
"Nation Time"	Joe Mcphee
"Armageddon"	Phil Cohran and the Artistic Heritage Ensemble

Still image from *Bush Mama*



Bush Mama (1975, directed by Haile Gerima. 97 min.) follows a woman's life that revolves around the welfare office and a community struck by poverty and unemployment, leading her to become radicalized.

Daydream Therapy (1977, directed by Bernard Nicolas, 8 min.), set to Nina Simone's "Pirate Jenny," cuts between a woman cleaning offices and her dreams of joining a group of Black revolutionaries, inspiring her to change her circumstances.

In ***Illusions*** (1982, directed by Julie Dash, 34 min.), a Black woman passes for white in order to work as a studio executive in 1940s Hollywood, covertly advancing a progressive agenda.

Killer of Sheep (1977, directed by Charles Burnett, 83 min.) shows children playing in the city of Watts after the Watts Rebellion, raising grave concerns for the physical and psychological well-being of children growing up on unsafe streets.

Passing Through (1977, directed by Larry Clark, 111 min.) features LA jazz musician and activist Horace Tapscott, who seeks to organize Black musicians to start their own record label, challenging white control of the record industry.

In ***Rain*** (1978, directed by Melvonna Ballenger, 16 min.), a Black typist is inspired by a flyer she received from an activist at a bus stop to leave her office job and join the movement.

Water Ritual #1: An Urban Rite of Purification (1979, directed by Barbara McCullough, 6 min.), filmed in an abandoned area of Watts, is about purifying an environment poisoned by violence and poverty.

L.A. REBELLION FILMMAKERS

Similar to the way assemblage artists compiled physical elements of their surroundings to comment on destruction and commodity, filmmakers in Los Angeles were also piecing together visions of their urban lives after the Watts Rebellion. African American students in the UCLA Film School—later called the L.A. Rebellion filmmakers—responded by fashioning a unique cinematic landscape and emphasizing the notion that filmmaking itself is a revolutionary creative act. Here are a few examples »



Still image from *Passing Through*



Still image from *Water Ritual #1: An Urban Rite of Purification*

An example of a Black Arts Movement poem, Amiri Baraka's "Ka'Ba" celebrates the strength of Black people. »

**A CLOSED WINDOW LOOKS DOWN
ON A DIRTY COURTYARD, AND BLACK PEOPLE
CALL ACROSS OR SCREAM ACROSS OR WALK ACROSS
DEFYING PHYSICS IN THE STREAM OF THEIR WILL.**

**OUR WORLD IS FULL OF SOUND
OUR WORLD IS MORE LOVELY THAN ANYONE'S
THO WE SUFFER, AND KILL EACH OTHER
AND SOMETIMES FAIL TO WALK THE AIR.**

**WE ARE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE
WITH AFRICAN IMAGINATIONS
FULL OF MASKS AND DANCES AND SWELLING CHANTS
WITH AFRICAN EYES, AND NOSES, AND ARMS
THO WE SPRAWL IN GRAY CHAINS IN A PLACE
FULL OF WINTERS, WHEN WHAT WE WANT IS SUN.**

**WE HAVE BEEN CAPTURED,
AND WE LABOR TO MAKE OUR GETAWAY, INTO
THE ANCIENT IMAGE; INTO A NEW**

**CORRESPONDENCE WITH OURSELVES
AND OUR BLACK FAMILY. WE NEED MAGIC
NOW WE NEED THE SPELLS, TO RAISE UP
RETURN, DESTROY, AND CREATE. WHAT WILL BE**

THE SACRED WORD?

Fig. 6 Tom Lloyd (left) working with apprentices in his studio in Jamaica, Queens, 1968. Photo: The Studio Museum in Harlem.



Black artists who worked in abstraction sometimes faced criticism because their art didn't seem to directly represent Black communities, prompting many theorists, critics, and artists to discuss and write about Black aesthetics.

Artists Jacob Lawrence and Tom Lloyd debated the importance of being an African American abstract artist as part of a landmark 1968 roundtable discussion, The Black Artist in America: A Symposium.

Lawrence [to Lloyd]: . . . You can be a very fine artist and I think you'll be contributing. There's no reason why you have to paint or work in a certain way, and have the image of Blackness written on your work to be a fine artist.

Lloyd: It doesn't have to be written on. But don't tell me that Black people can't relate to my work. I know what they say, "Dig it, a Black cat did that." And that means something to them, I know it does. . . .

The essays listed below continue the discussion at this time when artists were questioning their roles and responsibilities to their communities and to themselves.

"Discussion on Black Art" (Arts Magazine, 1969) by Frank Bowling kicked off a series of articles which defended abstract artists against the need to have a realistic style.

In "White Critic - Black Art" (Black Art Notes, 1971), an essay in Tom Lloyd's compilation, Melvin Dixon wrote about the absurdity of attempts to understand, criticize, and measure Black art as a white critic or within the framework of white, Western aesthetics.

"Toward a Black Aesthetic" (The Black Aesthetic, 1971) by Hoyt Fuller provides a look at why the author felt it was important to create a Black aesthetic and what purpose it would serve.

"Some Reflections on a Black Aesthetic" (The Black Aesthetic, 1971) by Larry Neal outlines attempts to define aspects that unify Black creation, including opposition to the white Western narrative and looking toward Africa for inspiration.

"Black is a Color" (Arts Magazine, 1967) by Raymond Saunders is an argument against an artist's success being measured by material gain and an appeal for self-actualization separate from commercial popularity or social constraints.

At right: Alice Neel, Faith Ringgold, 1977, oil on canvas, 48 x 36 in. Private Collection. © The Estate of Alice Neel. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London/Hong Kong and Victoria Miro, London/Venice.

This exhibition celebrates many Black heroes, including the artists themselves. Visit CrystalBridges.org to see and listen to some of these figures in their own words.

Muhammad Ali
"I'll Show You How Great I Am"

Emma Amos: Action Lines
Maya Angelou interview with
Anderson Cooper

James Baldwin's speech
at Cambridge debate with
William F. Buckley

Amiri Baraka interview
on The Writing Life

Gwendolyn Brooks interview
on The Writing Life

Dr. Angela Davis interview
from prison

Emory Douglas interview
with Mark Steiner

Melvin Edwards: Five Decades

Barkley L. Hendricks
"I Want to Be Memorable"

Barbara Jones-Hogu on
AfriCOBRA

John Lewis: The Selma to
Montgomery Marches

Senga Nengudi and
Linda Goode Bryant

Meeting Lorraine O'Grady

Faith Ringgold:
Artist and Activist

Betye Saar: The Liberation
of Aunt Jemima

Nina Simone: That Blackness

Charles White interview

Barkley L. Hendricks, Icon for
my Man Superman (Superman
Never Saved Any Black People-
Bobby Seale), 1969, oil, acrylic
and aluminum leaf on linen
canvas, 59 1/2 x 48 in. Collection of Liz
and Eric Lefkowsky. © Estate of Barkley
L. Hendricks. Courtesy of the artist and
Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



In 1967 the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) defined a Black hero as any Black person who:

1. "Honestly reflects the beauty of Black life and genius in his or her style.
2. Does not forget his Black brothers and sisters who are less fortunate.
3. Does what he does in such an outstanding manner that he or she cannot be imitated or replaced."

How do artists & individuals featured in Soul of a Nation embody this definition of a Black hero?



BARKLEY L.
HENDRICKS

"I wanted to deal with the beauty, grandeur, style of my folks. Not the misery."



Betye Saar is a visionary artist whose work often focuses on mysticism, gender, and race and was showcased in a number of solo shows and group exhibits during this time period.

Saar graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles, in interior design in 1949, but began shifting to fine art after taking courses in print-making. Saar and other experimental artists gathered around Suzanne Jackson's Gallery 32 where dance, performance, and craft were incorporated with art. She participated in *The Sapphire Show* there, the first survey of Black women artists in Los Angeles.

Saar also joined Judy Chicago and others in the female art collective Womanspace. However, like much art by women of color at the time, Saar's work was often displayed in minor spaces inside mainstream, male-dominated institutions.

Though they had to combat racism and sexism, many Black female artists were able to make significant progress in art and activism. Several took major roles in art collectives, such as Emma Amos in *Spiral*, Kay Brown in *Weusi*, Barbara Jones-Hogu, Jae Jarrell, and Carolyn Lawrence in *AfriCOBRA*, and Ming Smith in the *Kamoinge Workshop*. Others experimented with color, material, and form, including Elizabeth Catlett, Virginia Jaramillo, Howardina Pindell, and Alma Thomas. Senga Nengudi and Lorraine O'Grady were avant-garde performance artists dealing with Black femininity.

“No other field is closed to those who are not white and male as is the visual arts. After I decided to be an artist, the first thing I had to believe was that I, a black woman, could penetrate the art scene, and that, further, I could do so without sacrificing one iota of my blackness or my femaleness or my humanity.”

ELIZABETH CATLETT

Betye Saar, *Rainbow Mojo*, 1972, acrylic painting on cut leather, 19.75 x 49.75 in. paul michael diMeglio, New York. Courtesy of the artist and Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles, California. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.



Michele Wallace (center) and Faith Ringgold (right), Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC) protest at the Whitney Museum, New York, January 31, 1971. © Jan Van Raay. Photo: Brooklyn Museum.

Faith Ringgold helped organize the *Where We At* exhibition and artist collective. The 1971 exhibition was the first to exclusively feature the work of Black women artists. Ringgold and her daughter, Michele Wallace, protested the Whitney, demanding that 50% of artists in the upcoming biennial that year be women and that a percentage of those be women of color to reflect the population.

TWO ABSTRACT EXHIBITIONS

African American abstract artists often exhibited their art together, but also with artists of different races and backgrounds in order to expand upon the places and ways they could display their work. In particular, two abstract exhibitions in the early 1970s helped to shine a light on the work of non-representational Black artists.



Fig. 7 Installation view of *The De Luxe Show*, De Luxe Theater, Houston, 1971. Photo: The Menil Collection, Houston.

The De Luxe Show

The De Luxe Show was curated by abstract artist Peter Bradley in the fifth ward of Houston in 1971. Bradley was not concerned with the category of Black art, but instead created a platform where “good black artists share the attention and the tribute with good white artists.”



Fig. 8 Helen Winkler, Peter Bradley, Steve Cannon, and Clement Greenberg at the installation of *The De Luxe Show* at the De Luxe Theatre in Houston's Fifth Ward, 1971. Photo: Hickey-Robertson, Menil Archives.

Organizers renovated an abandoned movie theater in a span of just 13 days before installing artworks by contemporary artists such as Peter Bradley, Anthony Caro, Sam Gilliam, Robert Gordon, Daniel LaRue Johnson, Kenneth Noland, Larry Poons, and William T. Williams. The influential New York critic Clement Greenberg gave the show enthusiastic praise.

5 + 1

Organized and curated by Frank Bowling at Stony Brook University in 1973, *5 + 1* featured the work of five African American artists—Melvin Edwards, Alvin Loving, Daniel LaRue Johnson, Jack Whitten, and William T. Williams—along with one non-American, Frank Bowling. The exhibition did not differentiate between abstract and figurative artwork.

The introduction in the exhibition catalogue by Lawrence Alloway and Sam Hunter further explains: “The situation for Black artists is ambiguous: there is considerable use of the idea of art as an instrument to advance Black identity, Black rights; there is, also, clearly and successfully, an impulse towards the making of art as art. . . . the two themes of aesthetics and protest can be joined.”



Fig. 9 *5+1* exhibition catalogue cover, 1969.

GALLERY AS COMMUNITY

Just Above Midtown (JAM) focused on the importance of connecting art to its audience. Some Black contemporary artists specifically wanted to show their art in their communities, but many displayed in these galleries because they were not considered for exhibitions in major museums.

For this purpose, the creation of Black-owned and -operated galleries to exhibit contemporary Black artists was imperative. In addition to Linda Goode Bryant's JAM, several other galleries opened to foster Black artists and patrons throughout the United States.

Artists Respond to Museum Exhibitions

Black Emergency Cultural Coalition (BECC) was formed when the Harlem Cultural Council withdrew its support from the 1969 *Harlem on My Mind* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art because it did not include any Black artists or curators. Romare Bearden wrote about the show, "it has never belonged to us and while a lot of people listened to our suggestions about the project, very few of these suggestions were ever put into effect." Vocal artists included Benny Andrews, Romare Bearden, Roy DeCarava, Reginald Gammon, Daniel LaRue Johnson, Cliff Joseph, Norman Lewis, Tom Lloyd, Raymond Saunders, and Jack Whitten.

In 1971, Whitney's exhibition *Contemporary Black Artists in America* didn't include Black curators or staff members in the planning stages. As a result, there were protests outside the Whitney and 24 of the 78 artists withdrew from the show, including Romare Bearden, Roy DeCarava, Melvin Edwards, Sam Gilliam, David Hammons, Daniel LaRue Johnson, and William T. Williams.



Lorraine O'Grady, *Art is... (Unisex Barber Shop)*, 1983/2009, C-print in 40 parts, 16 x 20 in. Courtesy the artist and Alexander Gray Associates, New York, NY. © 2017 Lorraine O'Grady / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Lorraine O'Grady, *Art is... (Dancer in Grass Skirt)*, 1983/2009, C-print in 40 parts, 16 x 20 in. Courtesy the artist and Alexander Gray Associates, New York, NY. © 2017 Lorraine O'Grady / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Fig. 10 Protest at the Whitney Museum of American Art, January 31, 1971, with Cliff Joseph in foreground. © Jan van Raay.

“The Whitney Museum has anti-curated its survey which results in misrepresenting and discrediting the complex and varied cultural and visual history of the African American. The museum thus acts as a falsifier of history and minimizes the value of our works and therefore ourselves.”

STATEMENT FROM ARTISTS WHO
WITHDREW FROM CONTEMPORARY
BLACK ARTISTS EXHIBITION

African American-run art spaces represented their own people and communities.

Dale and Alonzo Davis opened the Brockman Gallery in 1967 in Los Angeles. No single style prevailed, but many artists, including John Outterbridge and Noah Purifoy, exhibited assemblage sculptures pieced together from found objects. Both emerging and established artists exhibited there, including Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, and David Hammons. The gallery also held concerts and events that were free and open to the community. Next door, the brothers housed artists and provided them with studio spaces.

From 1968 to 1970 Suzanne Jackson ran Gallery 32, after being inspired by teacher Charles White's philosophy that art could be an effective vehicle for community activism and social

change. The Los Angeles gallery served as an exchange for ideas; Jackson hosted discussions, poetry readings, and fundraisers for social causes, and exhibited work that demonstrated strong political and civic engagement by artists such as Emory Douglas, David Hammons, Betye Saar, and Timothy Washington.

Samella Lewis founded several galleries and museums, including the Museum of African-American Art in Los Angeles. She is the first African American woman to earn a PhD in both the fine arts and art history. Lewis helped start the group Concerned Citizens for Black Art to set guidelines and make recommendations

to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In 1969 and 1971 she and Ruth Waddy published two volumes of *Black Artists on Art*, in which artists speak directly about their work.

Betty Blayton-Taylor was a co-founder and board member of The Studio Museum of Harlem. Her work involved selecting and mentoring young artists in New York City. Later, Mary Schmidt Campbell served as curator and director from 1977-1987. Under her tenure, the museum transformed from a studio loft to the nation's first accredited Black fine-arts museum.



Fig. 11 Sapphire Show poster, 1970.

“I feel it my moral obligation as a Black artist, to try to graphically document what I feel socially.”

DAVID HAMMONS

SOUL OF A NATION ARTISTS

Emma Amos	Norman Lewis
Benny Andrews	Tom Lloyd
Romare Bearden	Alvin Loving
Cleveland Bellow	Phillip Lindsay Mason
Dawoud Bey	Archibald Motley
Frank Bowling	Alice Neel
Kay Brown	Senga Nengudi
Elizabeth Catlett	Lorraine O'Grady
Dana C. Chandler Jr.	John Outterbridge
Ed Clark	Joe Overstreet
Adger Cowans	Howardena Pindell
Darryl Cowherd	Noah Purifoy
Bob Crawford	Martin Puryear
Roy DeCarava	Herbert Randall
Beauford Delaney	Faith Ringgold
Jeff Donaldson	Herb Robinson
Emory Douglas	Betye Saar
Louis Draper	Raymond Saunders
Melvin Edwards	Robert A. Sengstacke
Al Fennar	Beuford Smith
Reginald Gammon	Smokehouse Associates
Sam Gilliam	Ming Smith
David Hammons	Nelson Stevens
Barkley L. Hendricks	Alma Thomas
Virginia Jaramillo	Bob Thompson
Jae Jarrell	Timothy Washington
Wadsworth Jarrell	Charles White
Barbara Jones-Hogu	Jack Whitten
Cliff Joseph	Gerald Williams
Daniel LaRue Johnson	Randy Williams
Carolyn Lawrence	William T. Williams

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