

ALPER INITIATIVE FOR WASHINGTON ART

IT TAKES A NATION



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**ART FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE WITH EMORY DOUGLAS AND THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY,
AFRICOBRA, AND CONTEMPORARY WASHINGTON ARTISTS**

September 6 - October 23, 2016

American University Museum
at the Katzen Arts Center

Washington, DC

ALPER INITIATIVE FOR WASHINGTON ART



FOREWORD

This exhibition presents the American University Museum's best efforts to accomplish artistic objectives rarely found in the same space and time: the exhibition is a program of the Alper Initiative for Washington Art, so our charge is to offer the community a venue for the examination and promotion of the accomplishments of artists in the greater Washington, DC region. And, as a grantee of the CrossCurrents Foundation, we are also committed to presenting an exhibition with strong relevance to the issues facing voters in the 2016 national elections. *It Takes a Nation: Art for Social Justice with Emory Douglas and the Black Panther Party, AFRICOBRA, and Contemporary Washington Artists* is the result.

The exhibition presents the graphic art of Emory Douglas, Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party from 1967 to 1980, and its cross-generational influence on artists living and working in Baltimore and Washington, DC, including AFRICOBRA, from the 1960s through the present. Douglas's

important work gave visual form to the 10 points of the Black Panther ideology that, unfortunately, continue to have relevance fifty years later: freedom, employment, opposition against economic exploitation and marginalization, affordable housing, quality education, free health care, opposition to police brutality, opposition to wars of aggression, opposition to the prison industrial complex, and access to the necessities of life.

The exhibition title is taken from an influential 1988 hip-hop album by Public Enemy, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*. The record, like the art in this exhibition, is both an artistic success and a strong political statement critical of whites for their violent and discriminatory practices and of blacks for putting up with them. Like the Black Panther Party itself (called "Public Enemy Number One" by J. Edgar Hoover), it is a call to resist and a call to serve your communities in positive ways, as well.

I am grateful to Sandy Bellamy for undertaking the formidable and timely task of organizing this exhibition and writing the catalog, and Asantewa Boakyewa for her curatorial assistance. Most importantly, I am thankful for the artists in the exhibition who have raised their voices so powerfully and eloquently: Akili Ron Anderson, Holly Bass, Graham Boyle, Wesley Clark, Jay Coleman, Larry Cook, Tim Davis, Jeff Donaldson, Emory Douglas, Shaunté Gates, Jennifer Gray, Jae Jarrell, Wadsworth Jarrell, Njena Surue Jarvis, Simmie Knox, James Phillips, Beverly Price, Jamea Richmond-Edwards, Amber Robles-Gordon, Sheldon Scott, Frank Smith, Stan Squirewell, and Hank Willis Thomas. We hope the exhibition is an opportunity to communicate, to confront uncomfortable and intractable truths, and find a way forward together.

Jack Rasmussen
Director and Curator
American University Museum
at the Katzen Arts Center
Washington, DC



IT TAKES A NATION OF MILLIONS TO HOLD US BACK:

A CROSS-GENERATIONAL INTERSECTION OF ART AND JUSTICE WITH EMORY DOUGLAS

BY SANDY BELLAMY

From time to time, museum curators may ask: What or when was the spark that ignited the flame for freedom among African American activists? That question presumes that the quest for freedom was an epiphany of enlightenment in a particular person at a particular time. The inquisitor inevitably presumes that freedom for themselves was bequeathed as a birth right, but for the oppressed, it became an idea whose time had come at some point later in life and was most likely in contrast to the lives of others. As a curator, that question has been posed to me regarding the lives of black leaders and artists from Frederick Douglass to Emory Douglas and numerous other oppressed personages throughout history. My answer regarding Frederick Douglass was the same answer I give now about Emory Douglas: the desire to be free is ubiquitous across race. Personal freedom to express oneself as an individual being, to live one's life as one chooses, and to embrace one's own journey is an innate human desire that begins at birth. The more oppressive the means and measures taken to deny personal freedom, the stronger the freedom fighter becomes and the more passionate a person's life work becomes. While the isolated flat lands and bigotry of Maryland's Eastern Shore produced Frederick Douglass, the dense cities in the United States that are populated by African Americans who migrated from similarly

rural lands produced Emory Douglas. Like many artists before him, Douglas was intent on portraying the reality of the people in hopes of creating a more just society.

As a bi-racial love child growing up in the 1970s, I was encouraged by my free-thinking parents to embrace all people regardless of their differences and to never capitulate to anyone because of race. However, even in the liberal 1970s, my childhood was framed by incidents of walking hand-in-hand with my father down a city street where people called him "nigger." When I was with my parents together, I felt the hot glares of people on my back, and my face flushed red hot as the catcalls and hushed jokes were passed gratuitously.

My formative years were spent in Washington, DC where an "Oreo" was not just a cookie; it was a nickname given to me in order to denigrate my ethnicity. Despite the racial slurs and jokes, my parents promised that the world was more tolerant than the segregated world of Jim Crow. In the 1980s, Michael Jackson, Prince, Madonna, and Boy George became universal icons of a new popular culture era where individuality and creativity were celebrated over old guard stereotypes. Indeed, it was professed that thirty years after the signing of the Civil Rights Act and more than a century after the

Emancipation Proclamation, a more enlightened America now existed. But it did not.

In the 1990s, the foot-dragging resistance of racial intolerance exposed the assiduous acrimony of a deep festering wound left unhealed. Four white Los Angeles police officers engaged in a violent and brutal beating of a black man named Rodney King. Fast forward to the new millennium; Trayvon Martin was executed and George Zimmerman was exonerated. In Baltimore, a young black man named Freddie Gray got a “rough” ride in a police van and died as a result. Eric Garner: death by police chokehold in New York City. A black 12 year-old on a swing in a local park was executed by white policemen. In Ferguson, MO, Michael Brown, a black man, shoplifted some cigarettes from a convenience store and was gunned down by a white officer. In Fairfax County, VA as recently as 2015, a 32 year-old mentally ill black mother was hog tied naked and Tasered four times at 50,000 volts each by six white jail deputies until she expired. All deputies were acquitted of any wrongdoing despite the fact that Tasers are only supposed to be used as a restraint device, and the woman was already completely restrained. This incident resulted in weeks of protests outside the jail and Fairfax County was labeled in the press as a “sanctuary county for killer cops.” Perhaps the racial divide and

the illusion of racial harmony was initially most visceral by the O.J. Simpson case. For weeks, the nation watched as O.J. Simpson, an iconic African American sports star, defended himself against charges that he murdered his white wife. The presumption of innocence or guilt was divided neatly along the racial fault line, and the rancor was visceral. However, as of the writing of this, we’ve experienced certainly the most bloody and unnerving time in generations. In just one week, two police killed Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, LA, for selling CDs and then on the very next day, in Falcon Heights, MN, Philando Castille was shot to death for reaching for his credentials during a traffic stop. Two days later, it was reported that five police officers were killed in Dallas, TX, in retaliation for police brutality. For too many of us who came of age in the 1970s and 1980s, proclamations of “world peace” rang hollow. In fact, society is as divisive as ever.

It Takes a Nation: Art for Social Justice with Emory Douglas and the Black Panther Party, AFRICOBRA, and Contemporary Washington Artists is a massive intersection of political and visual content providing a cross-generational conversation of social justice by legendary artist Emory Douglas and other artists in Washington, DC, including AFRICOBRA (African Commune Of Bad Relevant Artists), from the 1960s

through the present. The Black Panther 10-Point Platform is the focus of the exhibit, and the artists involved have created works that facilitate a dialogue about our salient past and contemporary circumstances. Each artist chosen for the exhibit has taken a leading role in merging exemplary aesthetics with sociopolitical awareness, reflection, and advocacy. Works include portraiture, abstract, conceptualism, multi-media, as well as two and three-dimensional installation. The exhibit examines how Emory Douglas, a world-renowned radical sociopolitical artist of the 20th century, continues to foster a communal dialogue affirming that art can indeed change people and thus, change society. Aesthetics, concept, and introspection resonate with the viewer, and in this exhibit, that power is elemental and pronounced resoundingly.

HISTORY

Emory Douglas's art of protest is inspired by both the Realism and Social Realism schools of art and elucidate the plight and conditions of the working class and the poor. The late 19th century and the economic strife it brought inspired artists of the time to create work that championed labor workers and depicted the harsh realities of the working class as opposed to the excess and leisurely lifestyles portrayed in the former Romanticism and Impressionism eras.

Gustave Courbet, Honoré Daumier, Jean François Millet, and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot were among the most notable Realism artists in this era. The early 20th century ushered in a more critical and multi-cultural perspective. The Ashcan School, based in New York, challenged

romanticized American Impressionist compositions by exposing "an unsettling, transitional time that was marked by confidence and doubt, excitement and trepidation".¹ Social Realism was popular during the Great Depression as works by Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, and numerous other Social Realist artists gave voice to the resiliency of the human spirit in the uncertainty of a



Gustave Courbet, *The Stonebreakers*, 1849. Oil on canvas, 65 x 101 in. Gemäldegalerie, Dresden, destroyed in 1945 during World War II.

world war, massive immigration, and migration fueled by industrialized economies.

The Mexican muralist movement, and its most famous artist, Diego Rivera, also championed Social Realism and through their art, exposed the colonial and imperialist socioeconomic political structures, which tread upon the indigenous people and their land. "At the time, most of the Mexican population was illiterate, and the government needed a way to promote the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. It was Vasconcelos, the famous Mexican author and philosopher of the time, whose idea it was for the government to fund the mural program for this purpose. Similar to mural use in the pre-Hispanic period and during the colonial period, the purpose of these murals were not simply aesthetic, but social, to promote certain ideals."²

In Russia, the Socialist Realism painters used their art to oppose the tsars and uplift the power of the proletariat consistent with Marxism. Socialist Realism is a style of realistic art that was developed in the Soviet Union and became a dominant style in various other socialist countries. It is characterized by the glorified depiction of communist values, such as the emancipation of the proletariat, by means of realistic imagery. The Chinese Cultural Revolution under Mao Tse-tung (1966–1976), like the socialist regime rule in Vietnam, brought forth new artistic voices that utilized various Social Realism art forms to depict oppression and to fight for individual autonomy.



Diego Rivera. Detail from *In the Arsenal*, 1928. Fresco, approx. 80 in. x 13 ft. 6 in. South wall, Patio de las Fiestas (Courtyard of Fiestas), third floor, Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City.

These artists sought to inspire and activate the working class to fight for their autonomy and individual freedom. Wherever there is oppression in the world, there will always be artists whose voices speak in opposition to that oppression through their numerous art forms.

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THE ARTISTS

When Emory Douglas met with Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the founders of the Black Panthers, in 1967, his dedication to the cause combined with his talented artistic expression earned him the position as the esteemed “Minister of Culture” for the Black Panthers. Douglas’s art follows a tradition of international social protest art—from the Mexican Revolution, the European socialist revolutions, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and more specifically, the Vietnamese Revolution.

In *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*, Douglas scholar Colette Gaiter states, “Douglas sought to take on capitalism and global media imperialism by visually and politically aligning the Panthers with the worldwide liberation movement. Images from Central America, Cuba, Asia and Africa served as models for representing revolution. The Organization of Solidarity of the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America, which is still in existence, was Douglas’s main source of international liberation art.”³

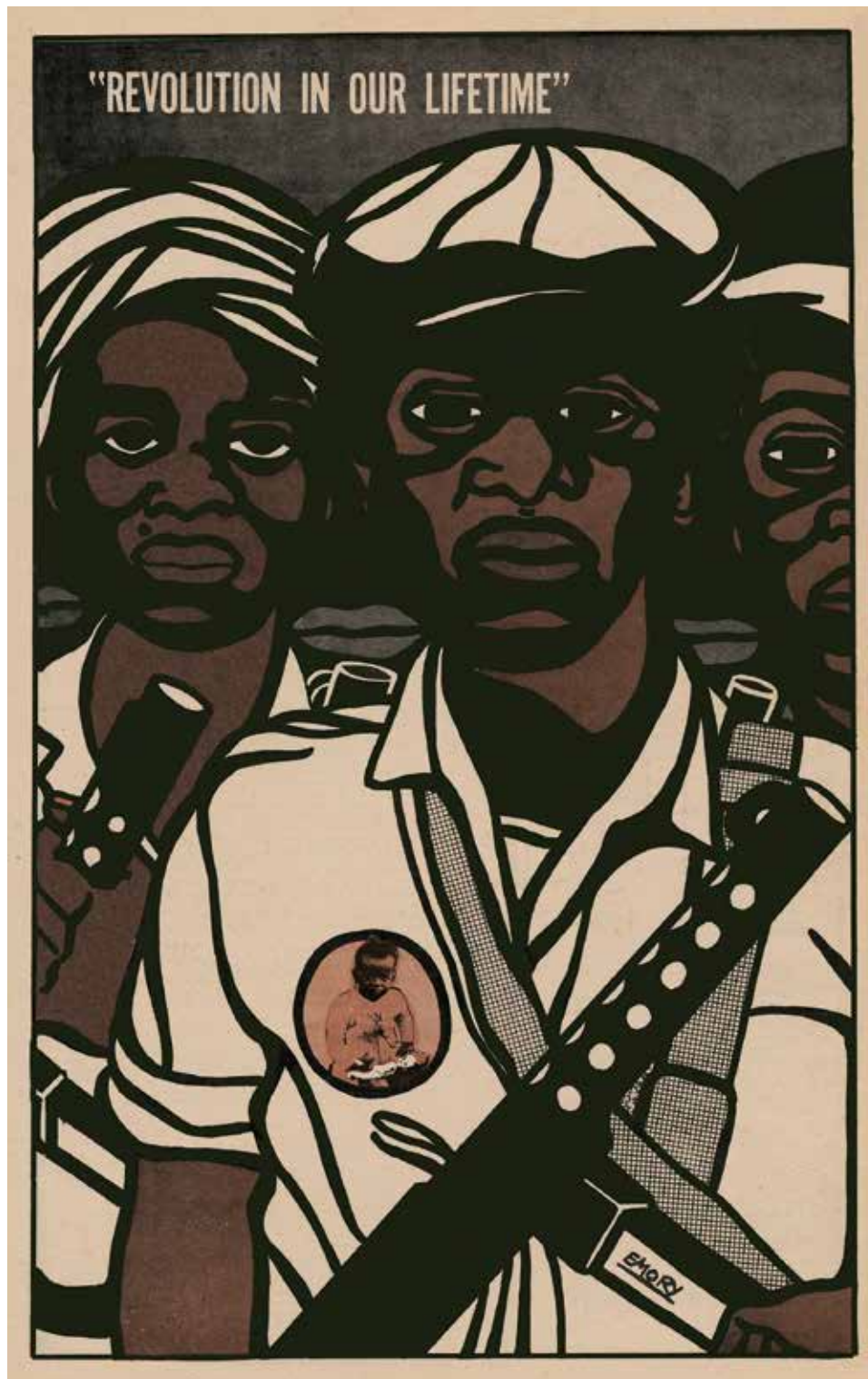
The Black Panther newsletter and wheat-pasted posters, which were distributed around the country, in cities, and on college campuses, featured powerful and compelling graphics in only a few bold colors depicting the work of the Black Panthers and

social justice issues articulated in the Panther’s 10-Point Program. At its height, approximately 400,000 Black Panther newsletters were distributed per week. Douglas visualized the journey of the Black Panther movement from initial armed resistance against unconstitutional arrests and searches, to oppressive policies, to the many community empowerment programs conducted by the Panthers. Douglas’s work portrayed the 10 points of the Black Panther



Emory Douglas, *Paperboy Remix*, 2013. Courtesy of Emory Douglas Artist Rights Society ARS, New York. Photo courtesy of Art Resource New York.

ideology: freedom, employment, affordable housing, quality education, free health care, opposition against economic exploitation and marginalization, opposition to police brutality,



Emory Douglas, *Revolution in Our Lifetime*. Courtesy of Emory Douglas Artist Rights Society ARS, New York. Photo courtesy of Art Resource New York.

opposition to wars of aggression, opposition to the prison industrial complex, and access to the necessities of life. Douglas, who was at the forefront of the Black Arts Movement and global cultural internationalism against imperialism, used his artistic expression to seek justice and freedom.

Douglas's works, from the late 1960s through today, are just as fascinating as his life. Today, his work and what he stands for are as relevant to society as it was

in 1967—perhaps even more so as his art, which has withstood the test of time and remains culturally relevant even 50 years later, shows that the supposed progress may not have been as abundant as some would have us think. Emory Douglas's work has been exhibited in numerous distinguished museums around the world, but this exhibit will be his first museum exhibition in the nation's capital, noted both as occurring on the 50th anniversary of the creation of the Black Panther Party

and as the United States is in the midst of a strongly divisive presidential election. This begs the question: Will the US citizenry move forward and embrace equality for all citizens or will the election divide the nation even further?

Emory Douglas's art is an invitation for discussion, and the artist himself is the provocateur of that conversation. Douglas's images, which are comprised of two or three bold colors with figurative composition, convey the urgency for relief from oppressive policies, but at the same time, call for hope and resilience gained from community self-help.

Douglas's graphic works, *Freedom*, *Panther*, and *All Power to the People* have been chosen

as the first graphics to be presented in the exhibition. *Freedom*, a constant theme in Douglas's work, is rendered in both black and white as well as in bold, vivid colors indicative of Douglas's distinctive style. The exhibit next moves to commanding images of the era's powerful freedom fighters—people such as Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Malcolm X, H. Rap Brown, and Amiri Baraka—who were noted protagonists of the post-civil rights era. Most significant and equally important in Douglas's work in this



Emory Douglas, *Justice Scales*. Courtesy of Emory Douglas Artist Rights Society ARS, New York. Photo courtesy of Art Resource New York.

exhibition is his poignant and compassionate rendering of normal, everyday Americans who used their voice to join the fight as freedom fighters or those who fought only to survive the constant oppression of the time.

The ideologies of the aforementioned Black Panther 10-Point Program follow next in the exhibition and are integral to understanding his vision. Here, his work evokes deep emotional empathy as he portrays the numerous men wrongfully assaulted, murdered, imprisoned, and drafted against their will to fight in wars to which they were morally opposed.

Economic exploitation is explored next. Two separate works provide an African American version of *American Gothic*, not Grant Wood's proud working class couple tending their own land, but as sharecroppers subjected to neo-slavery. Two additional works provide a contemporary and more urban example of the frustration faced by the black community in the area of jobs. In one portrait, a young man stands next to a broom in an alley wearing a bullet-torn t-shirt that reads "freedom," which clearly illustrates the irony in this young man's life. In the other, an older woman and members of the community are asking, "Hey Mister, What you doing to the poor?"

Housing, the number one asset that builds wealth for American families, is also addressed. A poster espouses the phrase "Housing is a Human Right," while another work depicts dilapidated conditions in public housing. This poster is typical of the ways in which the Black Panthers sponsored events and promoted their ideology throughout the nation. Another poster simply states, "Don't Support the Greedy."

The free breakfast program in public schools, which was institutionalized nationwide, was a Black Panther initiative. Indeed, the Catholic Church's SHARE Food Network has its roots in the San Diego diocese that hosted the Panther's free food program in 1969. Today, it's a world-wide, billion dollar organization. In *We Shall Survive Without a Doubt*, Douglas focuses on the Panther's free food program. To illustrate the Black Panther's involvement in this program, a graphic poster shows a smiling young boy wearing the typical Black Panther Ray-Ban sunglasses; in the reflection of the sunglasses are images from a collage of the Panthers serving breakfast. In a second work, a grandmother in one graphic and a grandfather in another graphic are both holding groceries from the Panther's free food program.

Education is another relevant platform of the Black Panthers, but not just education for the sake of memorizing established curriculum, but knowledge to enlighten and inform. The Black Panther's original phrases from the 1960s, which included "Educate to Liberate," "Ideas Cannot Be Imprisoned," and "Mental Bondage," all depict the Panther's desire to espouse the value of education, knowledge, and individual creativity as a means to personal freedom from oppression or bondage.

The final graphic in the exhibition is *The Next Time*, which depicts a middle-aged man reading the newspaper and saying to himself, "I know the next time I vote, it's gonna be for people's power only."⁴

WASHINGTON, DC IN THE 1960S AND 1970S

To provide context for art and activism of the 1960s, the exhibit includes outstanding artists from Washington, DC including AFRICOBRA, who studied and taught at Howard University, inculcating generations of young minds to infuse social justice into their body of work.

JEFF DONALDSON

The revered co-founder of AFRICOBRA and former Dean of Fine Arts at Howard University helped to create the visual component of the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. "Aiming to use art for social impact, artists such as Donaldson strived to create an 'art for the people'—an art form that was recognizable by and directed toward the common black folk, rather than a group of well-educated elite."⁵ One of his key works, *Victory in the Valley of Eshu* (1971), depicts an elderly black couple holding what appears to be an eye-shaped pinwheel. The work is filled with Yoruba and traditional African references, including the Yoruba Sango dance wand in the right hand of the man, references to deified ancestors (a Yoruba belief), the name Eshu (the Yoruba god of fate), and others. *Victory in the Valley of Eshu* is said to be a testament to an older African American couple who withstood pressures of displacement during the construction of DC's Robert F. Kennedy Stadium in 1961.



Jeff Donaldson, *Victory in the Valley of Eshu*, 1971. Silkscreen on rag paper, 40 x 30 in. Courtesy of Lou Stovall, silkscreen printmaker.

JAMES PHILLIPS

A professor at Howard University and AFRICOBRA member, Phillips incorporates African patterns and symbols in the foreground and background of his work to portray one design. His piece *Knowledge is Power and Power is Knowledge* is an African-based (specifically, Ghanaian Adinkra) cosmogram. Like an African mandala, the work portrays unity, promotes reflection, and is symmetrical. In this work, Phillips chose the Adinkra symbol of the ram's head as the symbol of knowledge and strength. The movement of the piece emanates from the cardinal points in a symmetrical format, so that from any perspective, there is a reversible figure-graph relationship. There comes a point where you cannot distinguish the foreground from the background, which reinforces the concept of the piece while also working with rhythm (defined in three parts of repetition, rotation, and reflection).

Contemporary Focus/Black Lives Matter, 2016, is another work by Phillips in this show. The installation of five heads are positioned in a communal circle and are used to make a statement about the whole idea of Black Lives Matter; an organized movement established in reference to the struggle of black people. Phillips applies his signature style, Adinkra symbols, to the heads to translate the sociopolitical circumstance of today. The Adinkra symbols signify the ability of self, interdependence, bravery and fearlessness, unity, responsibility, and readiness to serve.



James Phillips, *Knowledge is Power and Power is Knowledge*, 2012. Acrylic on paper, 30 x 30 in. Courtesy of the artist.

JAE JARRELL

Jarrell, born in Cleveland, attended Bowling Green State University in Ohio, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and Howard University, with a BFA, and graduate studies, focusing on fashion and textile design. In 1968, was one of the co-founders of AFRICOBRA.

In a review of the exhibition *AFRICOBRA 1*, at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York in 1970, art critic John Gruen for *New York Magazine*, wrote in the article "Big Bad Relevance" in July 1970: "Particularly arresting Miss Jarrell uses her cloth surfaces as a picture planes. She paints or appliques images relevant to today's black urban American. One quite elegant garment features a suddenly shocking yellow suede bandolier across the chest. The faux bullets are actually many cool ade colored wood pellets that shine ominously against the wool, salt and pepper, tweed suit fabric. Miss Jarrell is clearly one of the stars of AFRICOBRA."

In *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century*, art historian Richard J. Powell wrote: "Jae Jarrell's inventive work *Revolutionary Suit* (1970) most certainly alluded to the aggressive position that black women could take in this revolution of the mind, body and spirit."

WADSWORTH JARRELL

As co-founder of AFRICOBRA and former professor at Howard University, Jarrell emerged on the Chicago art scene just as the Civil Rights movement was rapidly escalating. As an African American artist, he felt compelled to produce relevant works that would not only echo the liberation movement, but influence the visual identity of black culture. With Jarrell's input, AFRICOBRA challenged the widely held belief that "protest art" could not be considered art at all.

Revolutionary is an homage to Angela Davis. Jarrell constructed the huge, heroic-perspective portrait around excerpts from speeches Davis had given. Jarrell painted Davis wearing the revolutionary suit designed by Jae Jarrell. He attached a cartridge belt directly to the canvas, stretching across Davis's shoulder and chest. The words "love," "revolution," "black," "nation-time," "resist," "full of shit," and "beautiful" streak outward in all directions from her head. Written across her chest and down her left arm is the message: "I have given my life in the struggle. If I have to lose my life, that is the way it will be." Most of her image and the background of the painting are composed of cool ade colors; the shadows and outlines are brown, purple, black, and dark blue. The letter B is used as a symbol



Jae Jarrell, *Revolutionary Suit*, 2010 (replica of 1970 original for AFRICOBRA). Salt and pepper wool tweed and lemon yellow suede with bandolier of cool ade color faux bullets, 59 x 27 in. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Doug Harris.



Wadsworth Jarrell, *Revolutionary*, edition 275/300, 1971. Serigraph on wove paper, 26 x 33 in. Courtesy of the artist.

for black is beautiful. The entire picture surface is filled with multiple patterns and colors, or as Black Panther members put it, it is “jam-packed and jelly tight.”⁶

Liberation Soldiers portrays Black Panther’s Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and others to celebrate their social actions—free breakfast and lunch programs for school kids, clothing programs, assistance programs for the elderly, and, of course, their self-defense program.⁷

Paul Richard, a writer for the *Washington Post*, reviewed *AFRI-COBRA II* at Howard University in 1972. He stated, “The show’s a knockout, but if you’re white you cannot righteously review it, not because its blackness makes you tiptoe, not because you’re tempted to compromise or condescend, but because the paintings bar you everywhere.”⁸ Richard goes on to say: “His images are built of countless B’s. His figures are hewn from color as a carving is hewn from wood.” He adds that with the B’s, Jarrell organically constructs not only the statusesque three-dimensional heroes, but also “the glowing auras that surround them... [making Jarrell’s] painting at once solid and ethereal. It is beautiful as well.”⁹

FRANK SMITH

Like other artists in the exhibition, Smith taught and studied at Howard University and is an active member of AFRICOBRA. According to the artist’s statement, he was attracted to paint texture and pattern as a young artist, seeking out a broad spectrum of European influences such as Van Gogh, Picasso, and Seurat. Raised in a family of musicians, Smith was especially attracted to Kandinsky’s association of art and music through abstraction. By working on several pieces simultaneously, Smith combines disjointed rhythms and syncopated patterns of paint and mixed-media by sewing the canvas together using a sewing machine. He does not deny the process or end product’s resemblance to quilt-making. Smith insists that the process comes out of necessity to sturdily adhere fabric together. Bright zigzag stitching joins colorful patches of painted patterns and found objects.



Frank Smith, *Stars and Stripes Forever*, 2013. Material, cloth, 45 x 40 in. Courtesy of International Visions Gallery and consultants.

Smith's work simultaneously pays homage to his African heritage and African art education while serving as a vehicle for his own challenges as a contemporary abstract artist.¹¹

Smith's *Stars and Stripes Forever* is a typical assemblage of fabrics constructed through improvisation but with the goal of representing America and all of its complications and diversity. This is one of many of his American flag series. Smith begins with red, white, and blue, and then improvises and lets it flow as statements about American culture.

AKILI RON ANDERSON

A lifetime resident of Washington, DC and a member of AFRICOBRA, Anderson creates art for the visual enhancement needs of cultural, religious, and public institutions. He designs, fabricates, and installs stained glass windows, sculptural forms, fine art paintings, and theater sets. Anderson is also well versed in still photography, cinematography, and digital media. He graduated from Cardozo High School in 1964 and attended The Corcoran School of Art (1964–1965) and Howard University School of Arts and Science, Division of Fine Arts (1965–1969 and 2005–2008); he received his BFA and MFA from Howard University in 2008.



Akili Ron Anderson, *Harriet Tubman on the Underground Railroad*, 2016. Fiberglass, resin and automotive repair materials, 86 x 138 x 13 in. Courtesy of the artist.

Anderson held the position of Artist in Residence for the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities (1971–1973) and was the first chairperson of the Visual Arts Department at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington, DC from 1974–1976. Anderson is a co-founder of NationHouse Organization (Watoto School) and a board member of the African Freedom Fund Treasury and Black Artists of DC. He is presently teaching full time in the Department of Art at Howard University.

Anderson's work for the exhibit is a powerful, historical, and ancestral narrative relief entitled *Harriet Tubman Leading the Underground Railroad*. He states, "I wanted to pay homage to Harriet Tubman and her sacrifice and leadership. At this point in my life, I am reflecting on my personal journey and want to pay tribute to my ancestors. Some people believe that history began with their generation's story. Each generation makes history, but we always stand on

the shoulders of those before us." This tribute to Tubman is a narrative that shows the progression of the freedom process, the travail and the victory. Many people did not make it to freedom, but they helped others. Tubman's leadership is depicted by her figure with an uplifted fist conveying her many victories. Tubman did more than attempt to achieve freedom; she achieved freedom, for herself and many others by organizing and working along with those making passage on the Underground Railroad. The artist describes his piece, the connection to Tubman and the African experience as the following: "There is also a symbolic representation of a railroad—of course there was not an actual railroad—but it is very African to use symbolism in art and culture. The depiction of the railroad is to show that we are still in need of that railroad as a people, not so much as a physical freedom as during abolition, but a mental and spiritual freedom is still needed. I also wanted to convey that we should count our victories

along the way, in order to have a positive outlook on what we endeavor. Years ago I met Fannie Lou Hamer—she is indicative of the leadership of the time, to achieve voting rights and fair representation. I see her in the same spirit as I see Harriet Tubman. This is an audacious piece. It's designed to embolden the spirit of our movement now. We now, as then, need vitality, energy, vision and that is what Harriet Tubman and our ancestors like Fannie Lou Hamer represent to me. I want this artwork to encourage the next Harriet and Fannie Lou. The act of helping each other is definitely in this work. The presence and inspiration of ancestors are there—reflected at her left hand. Another African symbol of freedom is the reverse perspective to the West African Gorée Island Door of No Return—an entrance into a Returning Door to our African spirit. I wanted the door to serve as a metaphor for our spirits returning to the time and place where we were free. That is where the railroad leads to—our freedom destination."

SIMMIE KNOX

A graduate of Tyler School of Art at Temple University (BFA, Magna Cum Laude, MFA) in Philadelphia, PA, Simmie Knox has specialized in oil portraiture since 1981. Prior to that, he taught at various colleges, universities, and public schools in Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Washington, DC. During the 1970s, Knox exhibited as an abstract artist and worked for the Museum of African Art in Washington, DC. In 1971, he exhibited his abstract art in the Thirty-Second Biennial of Contemporary American Painting at The Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

Knox turned to portraiture after years of creating a wide variety of paintings because he found that there was nothing more challenging and interesting to paint than the human face. He states: "I think that a good portrait is the most difficult thing for an artist to do successfully. Not only must you get an accurate likeness, but you must also create a good painting. Somehow you must convey a subject's character, spirit, and personality; the portrait and everything must communicate the dynamism of the subject."

Sun Up Till Sundown was painted in 1976 during the time when the United States celebrated its bicentennial. The exploitation of African American labor, specifically in agriculture, played a major role in America's development and wealth. Sharecropping forever etched an imprint in Knox's mind. Beginning at age five, he grew up as a sharecropper in Alabama. This painting helped him reflect on that unforgettable time when he literally worked from sunup until sundown daily.



Simmie Knox, *Sun Up Till Sundown*, 1976. Acrylic on canvas, 94 x 77 in. Courtesy of the artist.



Tim Davis, *Housing Issues #2*, 2015. Mixed media, wood, stones, string, 20 x 20 in. Courtesy of International Visions Gallery and consultants.

TIM DAVIS

Davis is widely recognized for his use of mixed media materials and exploring different narratives with graphite, sculpture materials, acrylic, photography, pen and ink, and collage. His focus has been to utilize themes that represent interactions of relationships between stylized figures, mysterious portraits, and unconventional environments. Davis' narratives are designed so the viewer becomes part of the visual conversation presented. His concern has always been the human experience and the black experience: the stigmas that overwhelm one's thoughts and cast doubt on one's identity while striving to be true to self, culture, race, and identity.

Davis was born in Chicago and resides in Washington, DC. He received his MA from the University of Illinois where he studied with artists Frank Gallo and Bill Carlson. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally including South America, Russia, and Puerto Rico, as well as Chicago, Miami, New York and the Washington, DC area.

The *Black Box* series are Davis' interpretations and reactions to issues in the US such as housing, discrimination, racism, incarceration, migration, political issues, and the many stories that make America, America. The forms and symbols can communicate our lives, past, and present. The drawers and cabinets suggest

opening and closing, putting away, making choices, hiding, and containing truths. The map of the US is a recurring main character in many of the compositions and corresponding stories. The goal of the *Black Box* series is to create the meaningful dialogue needed to move forward, heal, and find solutions to the questions and problems we all face.

Coming of age at the end of the Civil Rights Movement, during the Black Power movement, these artists not only created a new aesthetic with the specific goal of addressing intrinsic American issues of inequality and exploitation; they were teaching their children and the children in the community through festivals, theater, and newly introduced Black Studies programs in primary and secondary schools, that brought enlightenment and awareness to young minds. Now older, these 'young minds' are featured in this exhibition. Thus this exhibit not only provides a bridge between generations of intellectuals devoted to social justice through arts, it also provides a platform of gratitude. From the veterans to the young: for carrying on this vision of a more perfect union. And from the young to the veterans: for providing the tools to realize a continuing, yet as we will see, somewhat elusive, ideal of equality and peace.

MILLENNIALS IN WASHINGTON, DC

The exhibition displays the continued call for justice among younger artists from Washington, DC through sculpture, painting, photography, performance video, mixed-media, and installation within the context of the Panther's 10-Point Platform for social justice. The theme of protecting the body (a reference to *Between the World and Me*—as articulated by their literary peer Ta-Nehisi Coates) from the continued assault of oppressive policies is a powerful context throughout the exhibit.

HANK WILLIS THOMAS

As a conceptual artist living and working in New York City, Thomas' work focuses on themes related to perspective identity, commodity, media, and popular culture. He often incorporates recognizable icons into his work, many from well-known advertising and branding campaigns. In an interview with *Time*, Thomas said, "Part of advertising's success is based on its ability to reinforce generalizations developed around race, gender and ethnicity which are generally false, but can sometimes be entertaining, sometimes true, and sometimes horrifying."¹²

According to the artist's catalog from an exhibition at Brown University, in his piece *Raise Up*, "ten sets of arms extend above heads that are just protruding from the minimal white plinth they rest on. Cast in bronze—the medium of monuments large and small—these disembodied limbs seem to memorialize the universal sign of surrender: hands up. The sculpture is based on South African photographer Ernest

Cole's *During Group Medical Examination, the Nude Men are Herded through a String of Doctor's Offices* (1958-1966). In the original image, ten nude black South African prisoners stand with their arms raised, facing a wall. They are waiting for an inevitably violating examination to begin. Upon seeing this photograph for the first time, Thomas explains that he kept staring at the naked bodies, each more muscularly defined than the next. This voyeuristic act repeats the abuse already done to the men once by history. In isolating the hands and heads, Thomas frustrates the violence of looking by denying us visual access to their bare backs; by reframing these figures outside the confines of the prison walls, he returns autonomy to each body.

Raise Up was fabricated in early 2014, just a few months before Michael Brown, the unarmed African American teenager, was killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, and 'hands up, don't shoot' became a rallying cry for the Black Lives Matter movement. Considered within this context, the sculpture serves as a prescient appropriation of a vulnerable gesture into one of powerful protest."¹³

SHAUNTÉ GATES

Gates envisions his work to depict the effects of a collision between fantasy and reality. Some pieces expose the frenzy and momentum of a dream; others depict the pain of stillness. Within his work, Gates merges paint and photography to harmonize the dichotomies of reality and fantasy, using photography to roughly display the former and painting to



Hank Willis Thomas, *Raise Up* installation view, 2013. Bronze, 112 x 10 x 4 in. Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and Goodman Gallery, South Africa.



Shaunté Gates, *The Dope Effect II: "They Know,"* 2016. Archival digital print on metallic paper, 30 x 44 in. Courtesy of the artist.

show the latter. Through the lens of fantasy, Gates captures an allegory of the psychological effects that propaganda via mass media, and economic and political structures have on society. Gates primarily focuses on the individual and the personal conflicts within these structures. A viewer encounters a subject on the verge of something and is left to imagine their fate. Through the manipulation of light, depth and movement, the energy of the human psyche becomes the narrative. Gates' work is a reflection of his understanding of facing fear and losing control. It is the fusing of the two that forms the basis of his surrealistic depictions.¹⁴

In *The Dope Effect II: "They Know,"* Gates explores the war-like tactics used against key Black Panther members, including allegations of the government flooding the inner cities with drugs to sedate the population, create conflict, stimulate mass incarceration, and kill the spirit of the residents. The influx of drugs negatively

impacted the Black Panthers in their efforts to organize, enlighten, and protect and pitted the warlords and dealers in the community against the Panthers.

SHELDON SCOTT

Scott is a multi-disciplinary artist in Washington, DC whose work includes performative installation, spoken narrative, and the written word. His work is primarily informed by the intersection of race, sexual identity, economics, and exceptionality—ideals related to the black male form and function. Scott was born in Gullah-Geechee, Pawleys Island, S.C., where he was immersed in spoken word and griot cultures, beginning his creative career as a storyteller and later turning to fine art to share his narratives.¹⁵

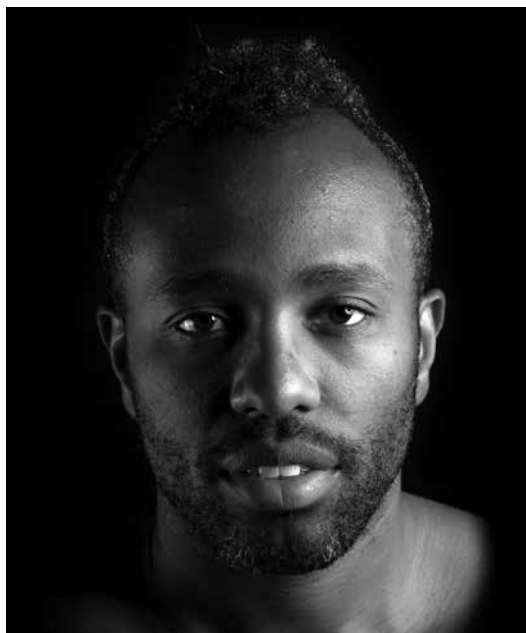
Scott's work for this exhibit is *Confession-Penance and the Mortal Sin of Race in America*. Scott describes his installation as "examin[ing] the new consciousness of race, as a construct

and consequence of existence in this country. With the constant stream of data through the advent of the Internet, social media and human rights campaigns like #blacklivesmatter, Americans outside of the spectrum of blackness, are now in an undeniable stage of the 400+ year dialogue on race where truer black narratives have found their way into the broader American consciousness. This new consciousness is not without its own set of responsibilities and consequences. In an effort to push the discourse further, a nuanced response is needed, yet the structures for this conversation have yet to be established on such a scale to result in a sociologically profitable conversation on race. My installation uses the liturgical reference to set up the conversation for repentance through confession, yet without offering absolution.”

STAN SQUIREWELL

Squirewell was born and raised in Washington, DC and currently lives and works in New York City. His artistic training began at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. Since graduating, he has continued his tutelage under many of DC’s legends including artists Michael Platt and Lou Stovall. Squirewell is a painter, photographer, and an installation and performance artist. His work is multi-layered, and his subject matter tackles themes such as race and memory through mythology, sacred geometry, and science. He draws his inspiration from theory books, science fiction movies and novels, avant-garde jazz, and indigenous storytelling.¹⁶

For this exhibition, Squirewell pays homage to Fred Hampton through two three-dimensional



Sheldon Scott, 2016. Courtesy of the artist.



Stan Squirewell, Detail of *Testoestro #37 (10 Waves)*, 2015. Mixed media, 50 x 50 x 6 in. Courtesy of the artist.

works of art made in direct response to Hampton's speeches. Instead of a literal interpretation, Squirewell chose to abstract the key principles of the Panther's 10-Point Platform. He depicts them in a larger context by bridging their historic narrative as pioneers who navigated the Ethiopic Ocean (also known as the Atlantic) from West Africa, landing in the gulf and eastern shores, while not forgetting those of us who traveled that road unwillingly into enslavement 3,000 years later. The ten waves are symbolic of the principles of freedom, enlightenment, and the right to command our destinies.

The second work in *It Takes a Nation* is a reinterpretation of the Afro pick, which is the most iconic emblem of unity and power for the Black Power Movement. Squirewell chose to embed ancient symbols from indigenous cultures around the world, most specifically West African, Taino, Australian, and Mongolian, that harken to the subject of peace, freedom, and lineage. The pick also references dream catchers and mandalas.

NJENA SURAE JARVIS

Born in Washington, DC in 1982, Jarvis is a multi-media sculptor and performance artist who began her art practice at the Duke Ellington School of the Art as a visual arts major, before moving to New York to attend The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, where she earned a BFA. During her undergraduate career, Jarvis worked mainly with costume-based sculpture, large cut paper backdrops, and other fabricated "props" used to illustrate to a semi-frightening,

brightly-colored cartoon environment where old stereotypes got fresh air on a satirical stage (the main protagonist was a crocheted brown paper bag man/monster).

After graduation, Jarvis began working as an assistant and carpenter while continuing her art practice. Jarvis transitioned from using the body as an armature/structure for these costumes to the body as literal document of inherited legacy. Jarvis utilizes the casting of the body as a vehicle to deconstruct the black body into modules. These modules inform a larger conversation about identity and questions if they are remnants of decay, violence, or regeneration.

In her piece *E, Gun Gun*, Jarvis created a modern-day body armor—a three-dimensional approach to personify arms and armor of the innate right to both, in the form of a contemporary *egunguns* protection of the black body. The work, *E, Gun Gun* is a visible materialization of the spirits of departed ancestors as they revisit the human community for celebration, blessings, and remembrance. These constructions transform the wearer into spirits that protect, bless, warn, and punish their descendants depending on how the descendants neglect or honor them. Traditionally practiced by the Yoruba of West Africa and their descendants in the African Diaspora, Jarvis contemporizes and connects the ancient artifact with black leather and Ray-Ban lenses worn by the Black Panthers to create a protector, not as the singular persona so often tied to civil rights activists, but rather, comprised of the many men, women, and children of the Black Panther Party.



Njena Surae Jarvis, *E, Gun Gun*, 2016. Leather, rubber, wool, felt, gypsum, and glass, 7.5 x 4 x 4 ft. Courtesy of the artist.



Larry Cook, Film still from *Untitled #1*, 2014. Single channel video, 2:56 minutes. Courtesy of the artist.

LARRY COOK

An MFA graduate from George Washington University with a concentration in photography and video art, Cook's work has been featured in exhibits at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD; Hemphill Fine Arts, Washington, DC; CONNERSMITH Gallery, Washington, DC; and the Corcoran Museum of Art in Washington, DC. He is currently represented by the Hamiltonian Gallery, Washington, DC, and is an adjunct professor of photography at George Washington University and Washington College.

As an artist who dwells on issues of image and representation in the city's black population, Cook states: "The untitled videos are a call to arms. A call to prepare for a physical, mental, and spiritual confrontation against white supremacy. The Black Panther Party called on

black Americans to unite and confront the systems of white supremacy. The video represents the carrying of the torch by those that came before us such as Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party. The signal flare is used as a distress signal. The symbol is used as a metaphor for the awakening of the black conscience. [It's] a reminder that the time for revolution is now."

JAMEA RICHMOND-EDWARDS

In her unique style of mixed media portraiture, Richmond-Edwards primarily paints women and is influenced by childhood memories and the complex lives of the women in her life.

In 2016, she created a series of drawings that examines the practicality of the Black Panther 10-Point Program today. In her work for *It Takes*



Jamea Richmond-Edwards, *Guns, Bubbles and Black Power*, 2012. Ink, chalk, pastel on board, 32 x 40 in. Courtesy of the artist.

a Nation, Richmond-Edwards explores the complexities of being revolutionary while living a middle-class lifestyle. The series is executed in black ink on black paper drawings to illustrate the inconspicuous nature of nationalism and militancy.

Richmond-Edwards illustrated for *The Jackson Free Press* and a children's book titled *Grandma's Biscuits* by Robert Little while studying painting and drawing at Jackson State University. Since earning an MFA in painting from Howard University in 2012, Richmond-Edwards teaches art to elementary, middle, and high school students.

WESLEY CLARK

Clark challenges and draws parallels between historical and contemporary cultural issues with a primary focus on blacks in America and the African Diaspora. He examines the psyche of young black males feeling like a target and being targeted. Clark questions tradition, or the lack of tradition, and the role it plays on one's values. Objects that are antiques are associated with historical relevance and wealth. By placing these issues in an antiqued object, Clark establishes the value of furthering a discussion around a particular issue. Analyzing historic and present social and economic disparities are what shapes his conceptual process.

In *Which Game We Playin'*, chess and checker boards represents the struggle to protect the black community against massive material power, gentrification, and displacement. It speaks to how strategic the process of displacement is. By pulling needed resources from a community targeted for gentrification, things slowly crumble, jobs fade, crime, poverty and police presence increases, and eventually the "For Sale" signs blanket the dismantled community. On the chess side of the game, the king and queen represent an old-moneyed couple. The suits with no heads represent the politicians and lawyers who work for them. The corporations are the rooks, and the police are the knights. The "For Sale" and "For Lease" signs are the pawns, because once you see a plethora of these signs, you know the game is in full play. On the checker side, a few checkers are still in place, yet others have been completely whitewashed, taken over in one broad brush stroke—a reference to how quickly and completely gentrification can change a community. A few checker pieces are left as a diminishing frontier, its spaced outlined in red. The red outline is a reference to the historical and current practice of red-lining black neighborhoods, and the space within the red lines, shrinking as a result of pushing and maneuvering until there is no space left for the black community under siege by white gentrification.

Clark stated that his other piece, *Target 4 5 6*, was inspired by the hook of hip-hop artist Kendrick Lamar's early work about being "young and hoping to see 21." Clark reflected on how essential, yet terrible, a goal that was

to have as a young black man. He created *Target 4 5 6* to confront what it felt like to live as a target and its effect on one's psyche. In this case, the target is partially destroyed. For Clark, it represented the idea of hope and reality, because the reality of the in-tact target is still there. It's been beaten, shot at, and lived—and yet it is still there. The reference of numbers 4, 5, and 6 come from Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of the book of Nehemiah in the Bible. Clark recalls that those chapters ask what kind of man you want to be. Do you want to fall and go with the crowd or stand up and be right good and just? Clark says he was thinking about that message and being a target at the same time. The target, when installed on the ground, appears to be an abandoned object, speaking to how blacks have been used for sport and for building and then discarded.

JAY COLEMAN

With a Master's in Education and Human Development, Coleman has been in the service of children for over 11 years, seeking new and innovative ways to engage and educate children with emotional and behavioral disorders. With experience teaching in public, private, and charter schools, he has concentrated his expertise in the field of special education. As a professional artist and as a father, his sensitivity to the human spirit has enabled him to inspire parents and students alike.

Coleman's painting, *The Pipeline*, speaks to the ongoing cycle of indoctrination and learned helplessness perpetuated by the special education and prison systems in the US.



From top: Wesley Clark, *Which Game We Playin'*, 2013-2015. Oil paint, spray paint, acrylic, foam, styrospray, plywood. 24 x 24 x 6 in. Courtesy of the artist.
Jay Coleman, *The Pipeline*, 2016. Oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in. Courtesy of Ausen International Arts.



Beverly Price, *Injured Humanity*, 2016. Film photography.

This especially applies to the black male and the pervasive onslaught on his freedom and well-being.

After attending Morehouse College (1990–1994), Coleman returned to DC to further his studies at the Corcoran School of Art. Under the direction of his mentor, the painter Loïs Mailou Jones, he began graduate studies at Howard University. Coleman’s portraits have been commissioned by presidents of colleges, such as Howard University, Morehouse College, Tennessee State University, Bryant College and countries including Angola and Cape Verde.

BEVERLY PRICE & JENNIFER GRAY

Price and Gray describe their work as an honor to their ancestors “by using their voices as guide to navigate this project. We reflect upon the words, actions and lives of the many ancestors who came trailblazing before us. Using a womanly perspective and gaze, photography is our medium for shedding light on the strength and backbone of our communities, not the underbelly. As Artists, this project reveals to us and the viewers a radical self-love and healing taking place in our communities, not just an ideal but a practice.”

Price is a native of Washington, DC and is currently a Liberal Arts major at Georgetown University. In 2014, she created a local clothing brand called Kemet in order to find stimulating ways to teach African Americans about their great, but often under-acknowledged, history. Price is a compassionate supporter of gentrification issues and is dedicated to informing those around her of the effects this has on African American culture and communities. She uses clothing, photography, and street art to creatively teach these issues to her community. In addition to her creative teaching, she currently works at Anacostia Park and takes pride in helping the community understand the importance of the Anacostia River and how it is essential for the survival of the Washington, DC area.

Prior to starting her “Activism” (as Price describes), Price spent a great deal of time wondering where her life was headed. In 2002, when she was a senior at Dunbar Senior High School, she was sentenced to five years in prison and did not return home until she was 23 years old. This life-changing experience helped her decide to do better for herself and her community. Price is a regular contributor to Barry Farms, Congress Heights, and the greater historic Anacostia community. She is also a recipient of the Smithsonian’s James E. Webb Scholarship.

Gray is a native Washingtonian. She graduated from Eastern Senior high school in 2000 and went on to study photography at Northern Virginia Community College. In 2012, she partnered with American University and the



Jennifer A. Gray, *Children under siege*, 2016. Film photography.

Anacostia Community Museum for the Community Voice Project to create her *Digital Story*. In 2014, Gray participated in Yassine El Mansouri’s project *Observation 001: What’s In Your Wardrobe* which was featured at Artisphere in Rosslyn, VA. Gray uses her voice as a photographer to create dialogue as it relates to the world around her.

GRAHAM BOYLE AKA ADAPT

To be true to the form and substance of Emory Douglas's early work, *It Takes a Nation* includes street artwork by the artist ADAPT—life-sized photographs of Washingtonians struggling to prevent displacement. These wheat paste images of DC residents photographed with protest signs and messages can be found around the city, especially in the Anacostia, Barry Farm, and other Southeast communities where residents are facing displacement due to development.

ADAPT is a DC based street artist and activist organizer who harnesses street tactics in response to some of the most pressing issues of our time. Often collaborating with grassroots organizations that have little to no budget for art and media programs, ADAPT engages with campaigns through by frontline communities to amplify the voices less heard by mainstream society to increase awareness and show the human nature of these struggles. Incorporating popular education-based methods in participation and hands-on art trainings, ADAPT has worked with multiple organizations in the DC area, including: Free Minds, a book program for prisons, Collective Action for Safe Spaces anti-street harassment campaigns, EmpowerDC's fight to preserve public and affordable housing, Family and Friends of Incarcerated Peoples anti-mass incarceration work, DC4Reasonable Development's work to save DC's public resources from being privatized, Melanin Uprising's work against police violence, and more.

ADAPT says: "The print installation I have prepared for *It Takes a Nation* is comprised of work accumulated from the last two years of arts organizing work in DC. Starting with a photojournalistic process, I capture images from protests and direct actions in which public space is reclaimed to express people's power in response to oppression and injustice. Since these actions are often not properly documented and are under-reported in the media, I try to create new scenarios in which the subjects of my photos are able to speak beyond temporary protest situations. The grassroots work I chose for this exhibition are inspired by the Black Panther Party and the lasting legacy of their 10-Point Program. Even now in the 21st century, in the power Capital of the US, many are denied access to basic human rights, such as food, clothing, shelter, and security from rampant police violence. This is especially true in the realm of housing justice, in which DC government agencies prioritize developer greed and profit motives over the needs of its long-term residents and low-income communities of color. I hope my installation helps to educate the public to the array of everyday struggles taking place beyond the incubator of a college campus and inspires these young artists, thinkers, and agitators to engage the local social and environmental justice movements taking place in nearby communities. The work begun by our elders of the Black Panther Party is far from realized."



Wheatpaste by ADAPT.



Amber Robles-Gordon, *Male and Female*, 2015. Mixed media on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

The black experience in America is fraught with struggle against oppression, yet the continuing quest for freedom and hope has remained constant. Emory Douglas and the Black Panthers always strove to stress community self-help and empowerment; thus, the final images of the exhibition conclude with Emory Douglas's *Next Time* and, 50 years later, the work of Amber Robles-Gordon.

AMBER ROBLES-GORDON

As a mixed-media artist based in DC, Robles-Gordon's preferred medium is collage and assemblage. Her work is representational of her experiences and the paradoxes within the female experience. She focuses on fusing found objects to convey her own personal memories inspired by nature, womanhood, and her belief in recycling energy and materials.

Awakening the Matrilineal - a visual exploration of Blackness and Matrilineality is a visual representation designed to awaken the bloodlines and ancestral memories that link us all. Each circular form summons the undeniable divine and innate cellular power within each of us.

As the artist describes, this work is an extension of the previously created installation, *The Male and Female*, 2015, which consists of four circular forms: The Male, The Architect, The Protector—the outer circle—and The Male as The Universe as the inner circle. The Female consists of The Female, The Oracle, The Nurturer, and The One, The Source Within as the inner circle.

The Male and Female installation represents the potential for masculine and feminine energy, within the black male and female, their reliance on each other, and on the universe.

Awakening the Matrilineal installation metaphorically explores the influence of African culture, cosmologies and how the genealogical roots of blackness relate to everyone. This installation consists of multiple 34 by 36 inch circular pieces arranged in a larger circular formation. Each annular form is enshrined in a circle of protection created by the fusion of varying elemental and spiritual based practices and interpretations of the visual languages and iconography the Ancient Egyptians, the Nsibidi of Nigeria, the West African Adinkra symbols, and the Sacred Geometry of other indigenous cultures worldwide. Each discoid focuses on a different aspect of the human experience as related to the physical, spiritual, emotional, and social planes of existence.

HOLLY BASS

A multi-disciplinary performance and visual artist, writer, and director based in DC, Bass is best known for a body of work where she explores the endless allure of the black female body—from *Venus Hottentots* to video vixens. Her work has been presented at spaces such as the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Smithsonian Institution, the Seattle Art Museum, and the South African State Theatre.

Bass's immersive installation in *It Takes a Nation*, an ephemeral juxtaposition of the memory of exploitation in the cotton fields to the might of



Holly Bass, *Jump Down*, 2016. Digital film still. Courtesy of the artist.

will to break free from that exploitation, takes the shape of a wooden house frame. Two transparent walls of draped vintage cotton sheets are suspended from the frame serving as projection screens. A video titled *Jump Down* from the series *Root Work* plays on one wall. *Jump Down* was shot in rural Georgia and features the artist in a white dress and men's brogue boots dancing a shuffle jig on a dilapidated porch. The aesthetics of the video recall the pre-Civil Rights Era South. The audio features the artist singing the field blues song, "Pick a Bale of Cotton," popularized by singer Lead Belly. The second video includes images of women's afros and raised fists and features audio of Black Panther rallies, activist Angela Davis, and the artist speaking about the role of women in the Black Liberation Movement. Together, the two videos speak to the invisible labor of black women across various decades of black life and in the struggle for equality.

CAN ART REALLY MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE?

Artists who seek to use their work as a means for justice are embracing a lofty task. Not only do they seek to achieve a quality aesthetic and meaningful concept, they also attempt to foster introspection and reflection and then, hopefully, change.

Artists have employed many styles in the process of creating work that seeks justice, from painterly Realism and Social Realism works, Socialist Realism posters, and larger than life murals to silk screen prints meant for mass production. While there is a tradition in the aesthetic and style of Protest Art, we see that today's artists use as many tools as they can to express themselves.

In the continuing historical thread of socio-political art, the concept of justice is constant.

Sometimes the concept seeks justice by revealing truths, by illustrating excesses and hypocrisy, by portraitizing heroes of movements, or by simply conveying the message verbatim. In any case, throughout the history of sociopolitical art, the form is as equally important as the function.

Artists who use their work to seek justice encourage the viewer to challenge their own thoughts, beliefs, nostalgia, and vision. When viewing any of these works, the viewer instantly contextualizes the artist's message through the lens of their personal biases and understanding.

Whether or not people or situations actually change for what the artist's sees as better, is not guaranteed. Artists know this. Whether or not their work inspired actual change in one person or an entire society is not the measure of success for an artist. As with any human being, that measure is living their individual truth. Whether society catches up with it, now or 50 years from now, is to be seen. Time always tells.

When Emory Douglas began painting outrageous revolutionary images and messages, he and his peers were deemed "enemy number one" by Richard Nixon and J. Edgar Hoover. Artists who chose to advocate for social justice in their works were subjected to condescending reviews. Yet, they persevered in their truth and continued to merge aesthetics, concept, reflection, and change together in poignant works of art that we still cherish to this day. Now, 50 years later, Emory Douglas is exhibiting

world-wide and continuing to collaborate with and inspire young people as they confront injustice. AFRICOBRA is one of the longest-running schools of art in the world, and younger generations continue to carry the torch of freedom and justice.

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Cover: Emory Douglas, *Justice Scales*. © Emory
Douglas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.
Photo courtesy: Emory Douglas / Art Resource,
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Page 3: Hank Willis Thomas, *Raise Up*, 2013.
Bronze, 112 x 10 x 4 in. Courtesy of the artist,
Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and Goodman
Gallery, South Africa.

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FOR WASHINGTON ART

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IT TAKES A NATION OF MILLIONS TO HOLD US BACK
—PUBLIC ENEMY, 1988