

Artists & Social Justice

SUPPLEMENTAL WORKS

The following selections from the Blanton Museum of Art's collection represent alternatives to works of art featured in *Artists and Social Justice*. They introduce themes of police brutality, white supremacy, gender expression, xenophobia, and media bias — among others.

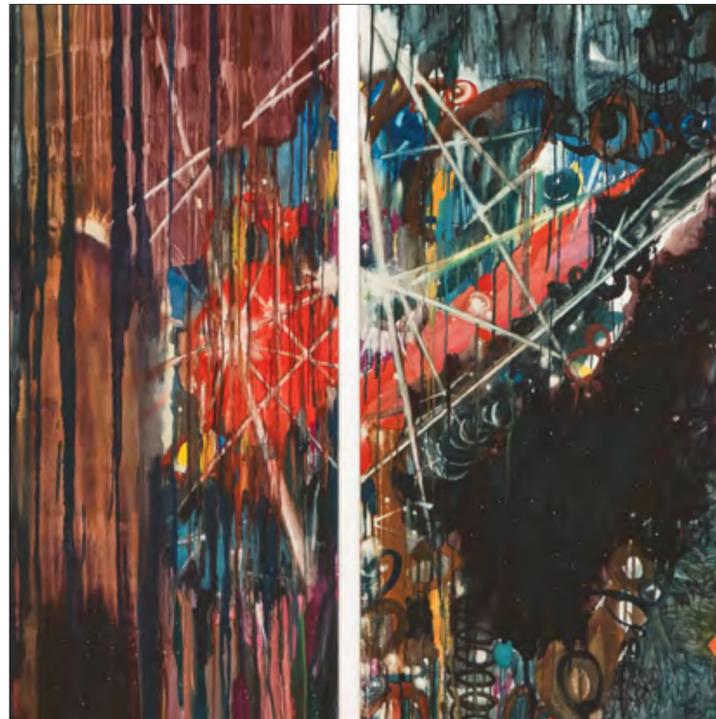
Those who peruse the collection online at collection.blantonmuseum.org will find many other works of art that might be used to stimulate dialogue or generate assignments on a range of social issues. If needed, University of Texas faculty and staff may access larger image files via the Digital Archives System (DASE) at bit.ly/BlantonDASE. Try showing the image of the artwork first, to encourage student observations, before sharing the close-ups and contextual information.

In making your selections, please be aware that powerful images may be disturbing or controversial for some students. We recommend having clear guidelines for respectful dialogue in place. Some students may need alternative assignments, emotional support, or referrals to the University's Counseling and Mental Health Center at cmhc.utexas.edu. In general, images closely aligned with course readings and discussions will be less charged — but never underestimate the power of art.

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DETAILS



Mequitta Ahuja

***Parade*, 2007**

Enamel on canvas, two panels, 96 in. x 160 in.

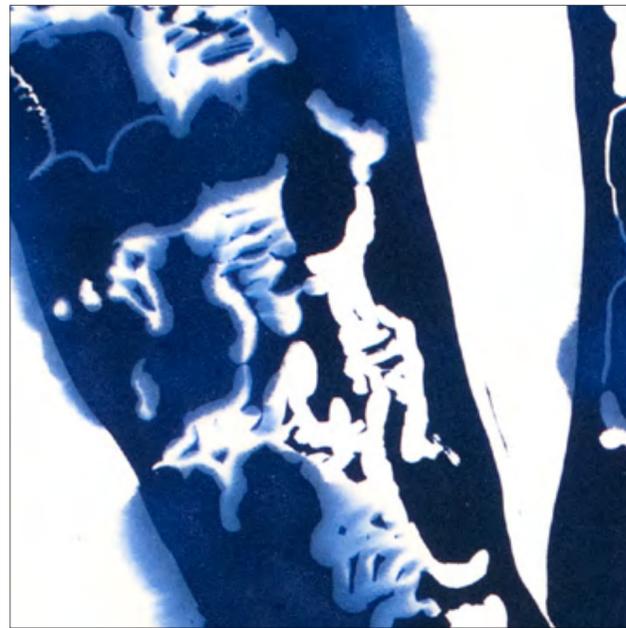
**Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,
Gift of Melanie Lawson and John F. Guess, Jr., in honor of
Jeanne and Michael Klein, 2010**

© Mequitta Ahuja

Mequitta Ahuja's work explores the construction of identity, including her own. Recognizing that there is always an element of invention when it comes to depicting oneself, the artist refers to her heavily manipulated self-portraits as "automythography." The term was inspired by a genre invented by the writer Audre Lorde, who braided personal history together with mythology in her "biomythography," published in 1982. Ahuja's process of self-documentation begins with photographs. Using a remote shutter control, she performs privately for the camera. Then, through a series of sketches and preparatory drawings, she introduces inventive, often fantastical elements into the resulting images. Her final works wed the real with the surreal, nonfiction with fiction. *Parade* captures this complicated marriage, offering in two parts the primary modes of painting: figuration and abstraction. The artist appears, poised mid-stride, on the right-hand canvas. Bright colors describe her figure and emanate from her Black hair, which, as it carries over toward and onto the left-hand canvas, expands to become a dense cloud of increasingly abstract markings. The brushwork conveys Ahuja's lively kinetic process in laying down pigment. She has referred to her interest in "the psychic proportions hair has in the lives of Black people," which here dominates the composition, both physically and conceptually.



DETAILS



Eric Avery

***Not the Feet of the One and Only*, 1993**

Linoleum cut with bled handwork, 24 3/16 in. x 19 1/8 in.

Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,

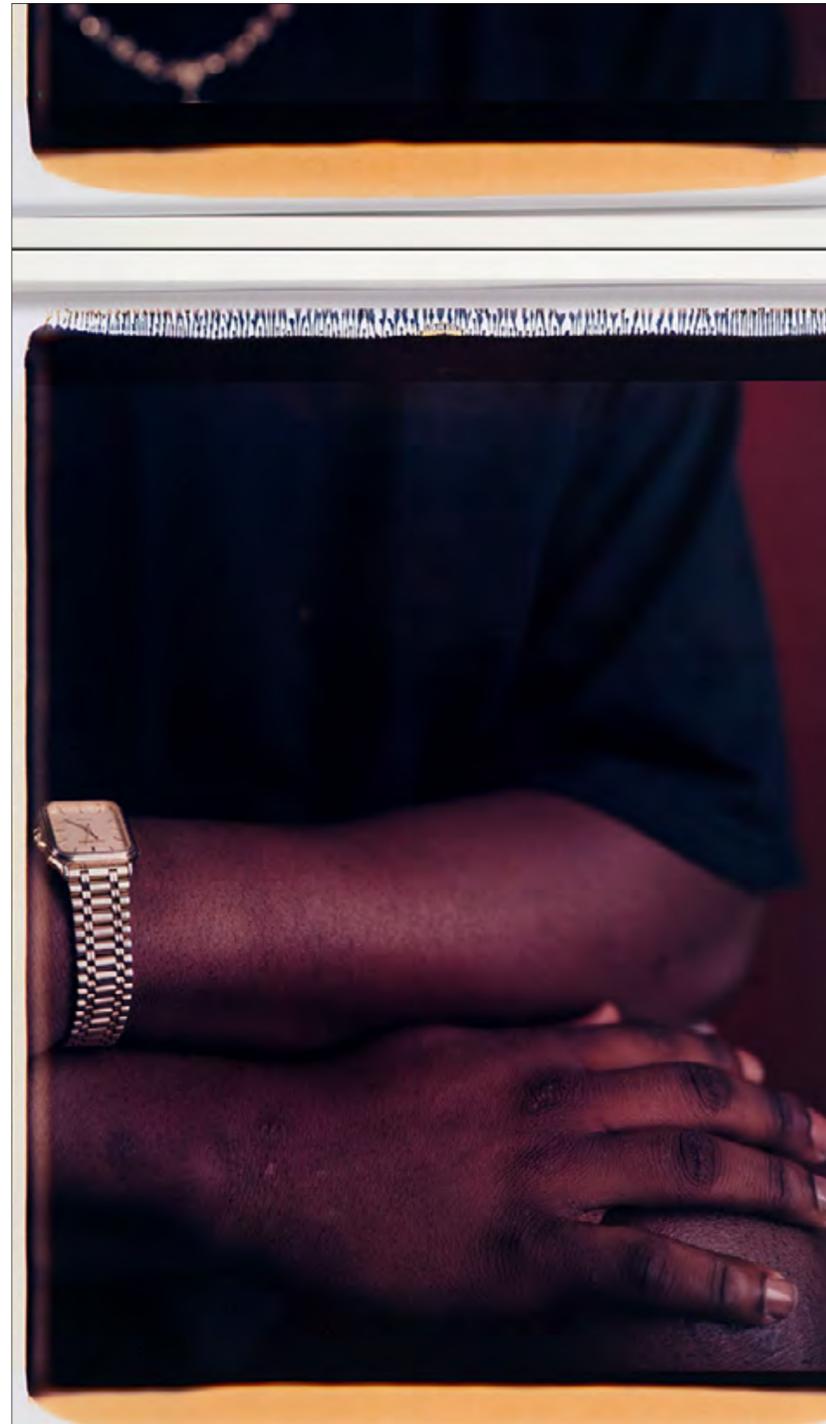
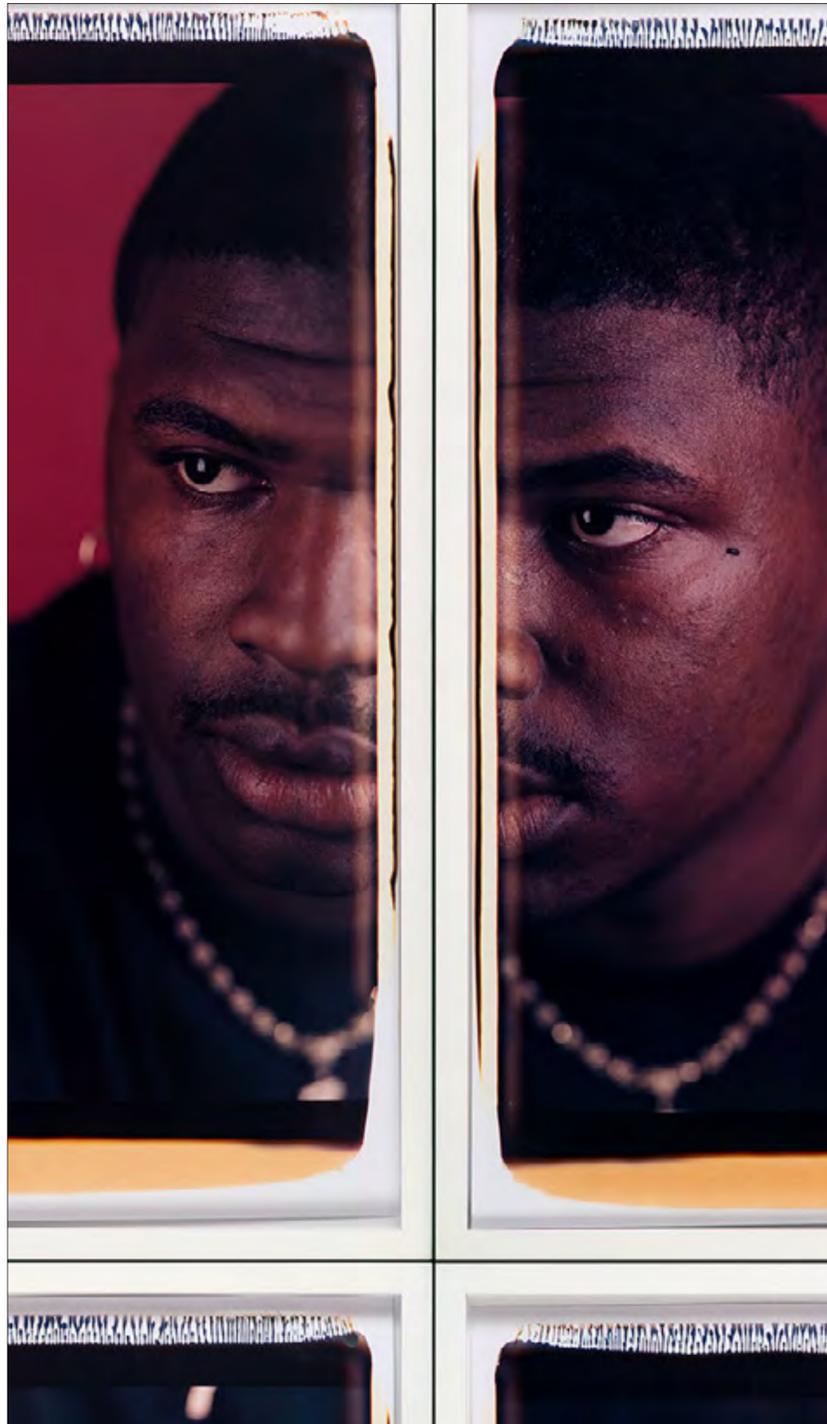
The Karen G. and Dr. Elgin W. Ware, Jr. Collection, 1996

© Eric Avery

This print presents the link between the emotional and physical realities of the AIDS patients that Avery treated as a psychiatrist. *Not the Feet of the One and Only* is inspired by Avery's own massaging of the feet of one of his first patients at a time when many AIDS workers worried about exposure to the disease. The patient had Kaposi's sarcoma, a common AIDS-related skin cancer.



DETAILS



Dawoud Bey

***Oris*, 1996**

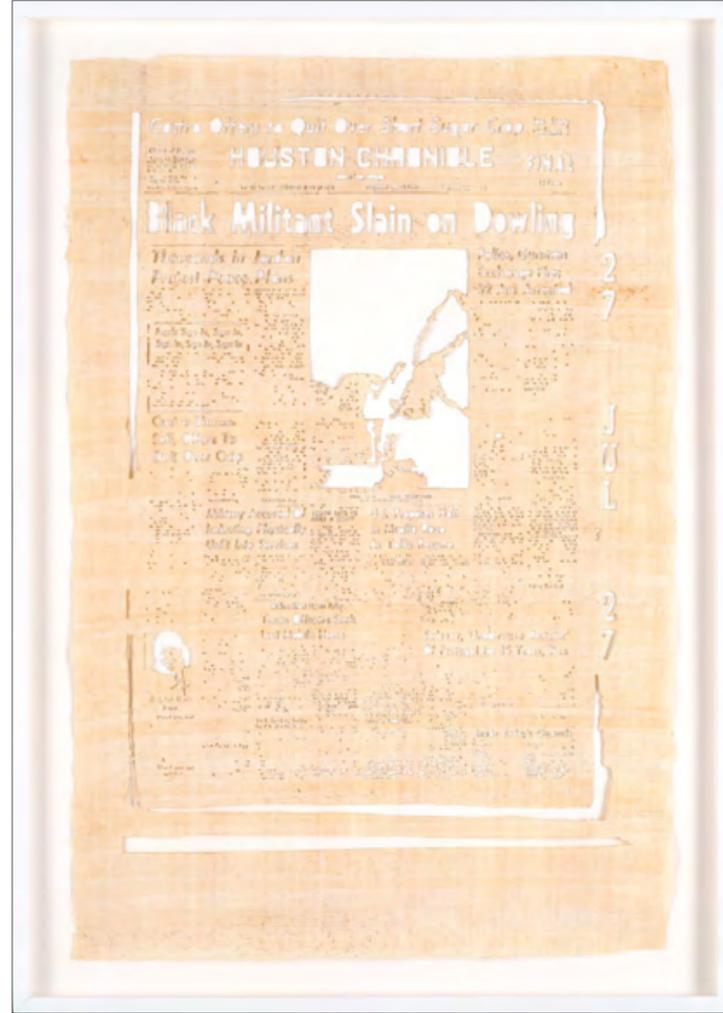
Four Polaroid (Polacolor ER) photographs, 62 1/4 in. x 47 1/2 in.

**Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,
Gift of Lorri and Barry Hammer, 2014**

© Dawoud Bey

For the last thirty years, Dawoud Bey has used a rare, large-format Polaroid view camera to create intimate, detailed portraits. Many of these photographs lavish attention on Black teenagers, a group historically excluded from the genre of portraiture, and often represented in very negative ways in the media. Bey says, "Having had so much taken from them, I want my subjects to reclaim their right to look, to see, and to be seen."

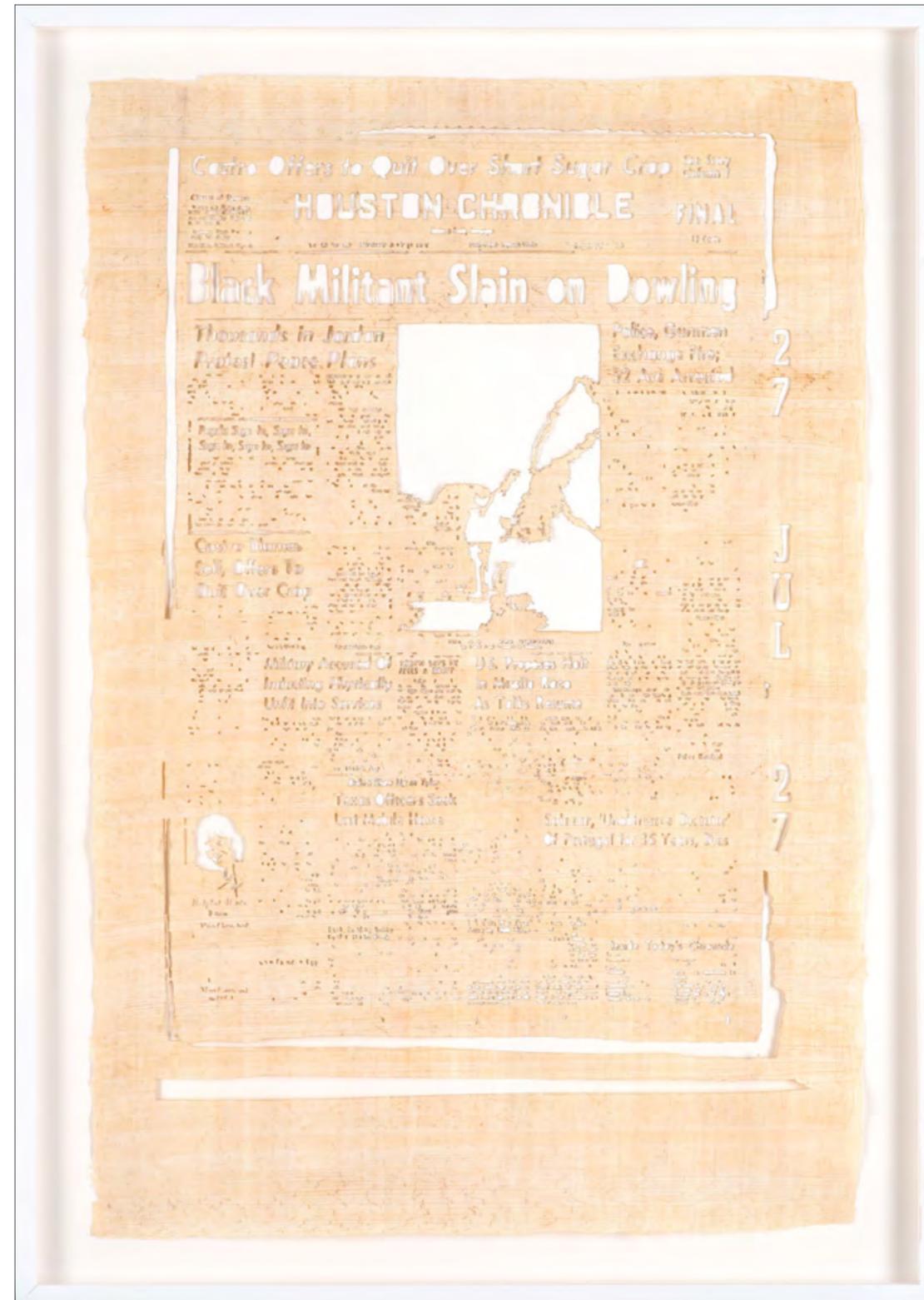
Sitting for a Bey Polaroid portrait often takes as much as four hours. Bey enjoys the process of collaborating with each sitter, and the camera requires careful adjustment and long exposures. According to the artist, he tries not to give his sitters too much direction, preferring that they relax and find a private space in front of the camera. These large-scale Polaroids allow the artist to work with lush colors and to highlight the individuality of his sitters. By combining four unique photographs to build this portrait, Bey suggests the complexity of *Oris*, inviting our empathic regard.



Eroding Witness 7a



Eroding Witness 7b



Eroding Witness 7c



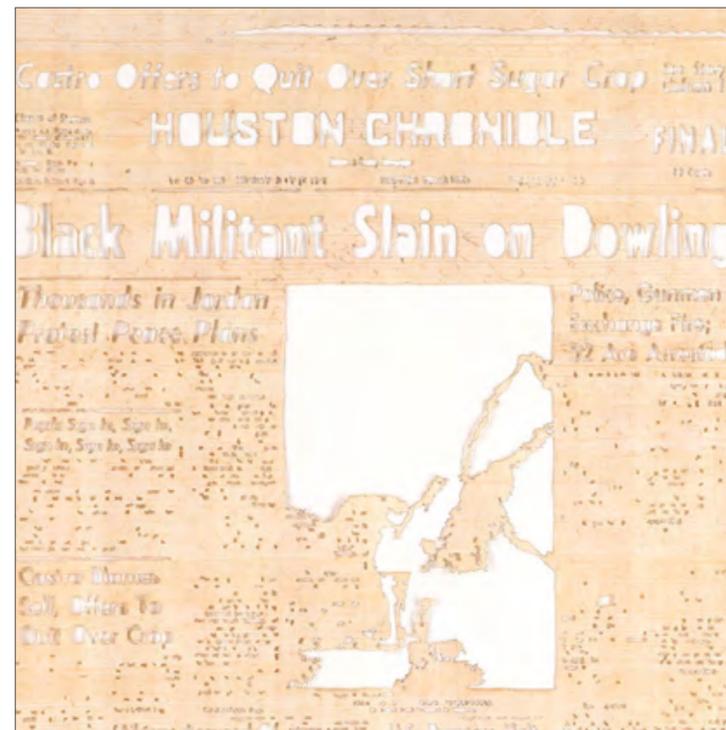
Eroding Witness 7d



DETAILS



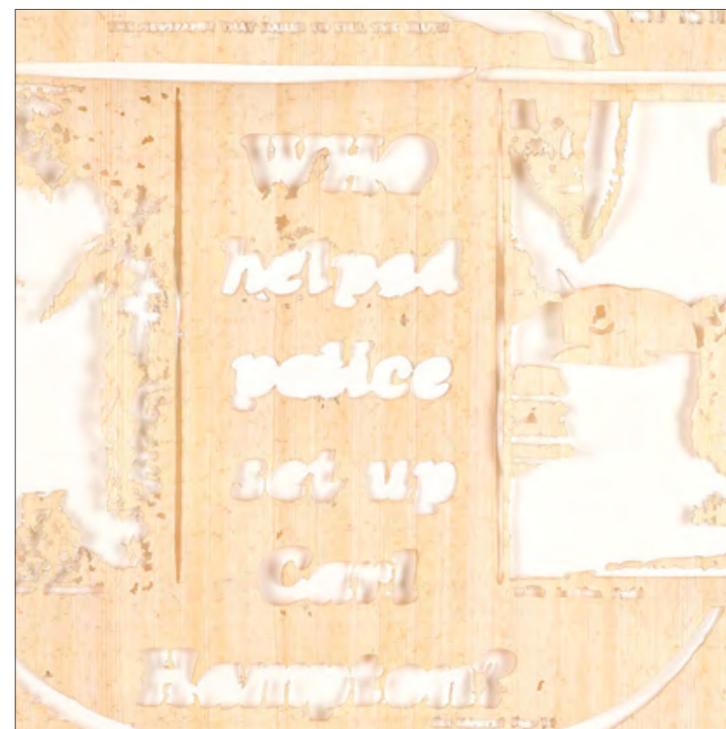
Eroding Witness 7a



Eroding Witness 7b



Eroding Witness 7c



Eroding Witness 7d

Jamal Cyrus

***Eroding Witness 7a*, 2014**

Laser-cut papyrus, 25 in. x 16 5/8 in.

***Eroding Witness 7b*, 2014**

Laser-cut papyrus, 24 3/16 in. x 16 1/2 in.

***Eroding Witness 7c*, 2014**

Laser-cut papyrus, 25 in. x 16 3/4 in.

***Eroding Witness 7d*, 2014**

Laser-cut papyrus, 25 in. x 17 in.

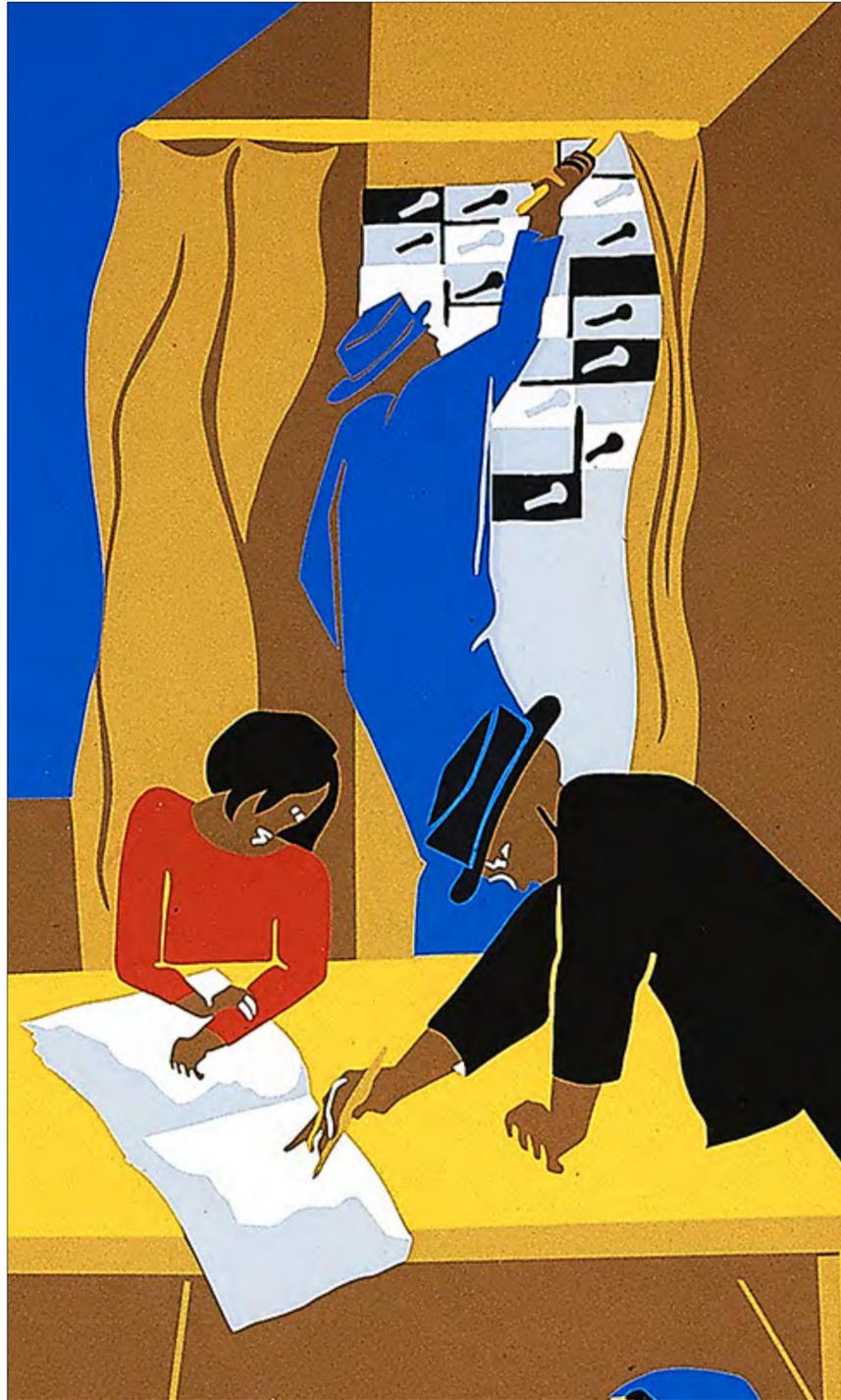
**Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,
Purchase through the generosity of Jeanne and Michael
Klein, 2014**

© Jamal Cyrus

Artist Jamal Cyrus was an undergraduate in college at the University of Houston when he first learned about Carl Hampton, a Black activist who was shot by the Houston Police in 1970. Fascinated by his hometown's little-known Civil Rights Movement, Cyrus has characterized Hampton's assassination as "a trauma that the next generation wanted to forget." After closely researching this largely forgotten event, Cyrus created *Eroding Witness*, laser-cut drawings that examine the four dramatically divergent accounts of Hampton's murder in local newspapers of the time: the Houston Chronicle, Houston Post, The Voice of Hope, and the Houston Forward Times. Cyrus's decision to laser-cut the newspaper text enacts a removal that reinforces the violence of Hampton's death and his absence from history. His choice of papyrus, an early writing material associated with ancient Egypt, suggests the timeless nature of this violence. By comparing the different accounts and treatment of this event, *Eroding Witness* reminds us that our understanding of the present and past is inevitably shaped by the way the media frames the events it reports through the words and images it deploys. The title underlines the way one day's headlines gradually recede from consciousness into collective amnesia. These drawings offer an attempt to serve as a belated witness to this event while capturing the messy complexity and instability of history and of language itself.



DETAILS



Jacob Lawrence

The 1920's...The Migrants Cast their Ballots, from *Kent Bicentennial Portfolio: Spirit of Independence*, 1974

Eight-color screenprint, 34 7/16 in. x 25 7/8 in.

Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,
Gift of Lorillard Division of Loews Theatres, Inc., 1976

©The Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation,
Seattle/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



DETAIL



Jacob Lawrence

The Eviction, 1935

Gouache and collage on cardboard, 28 in. x 38 3/8 in.

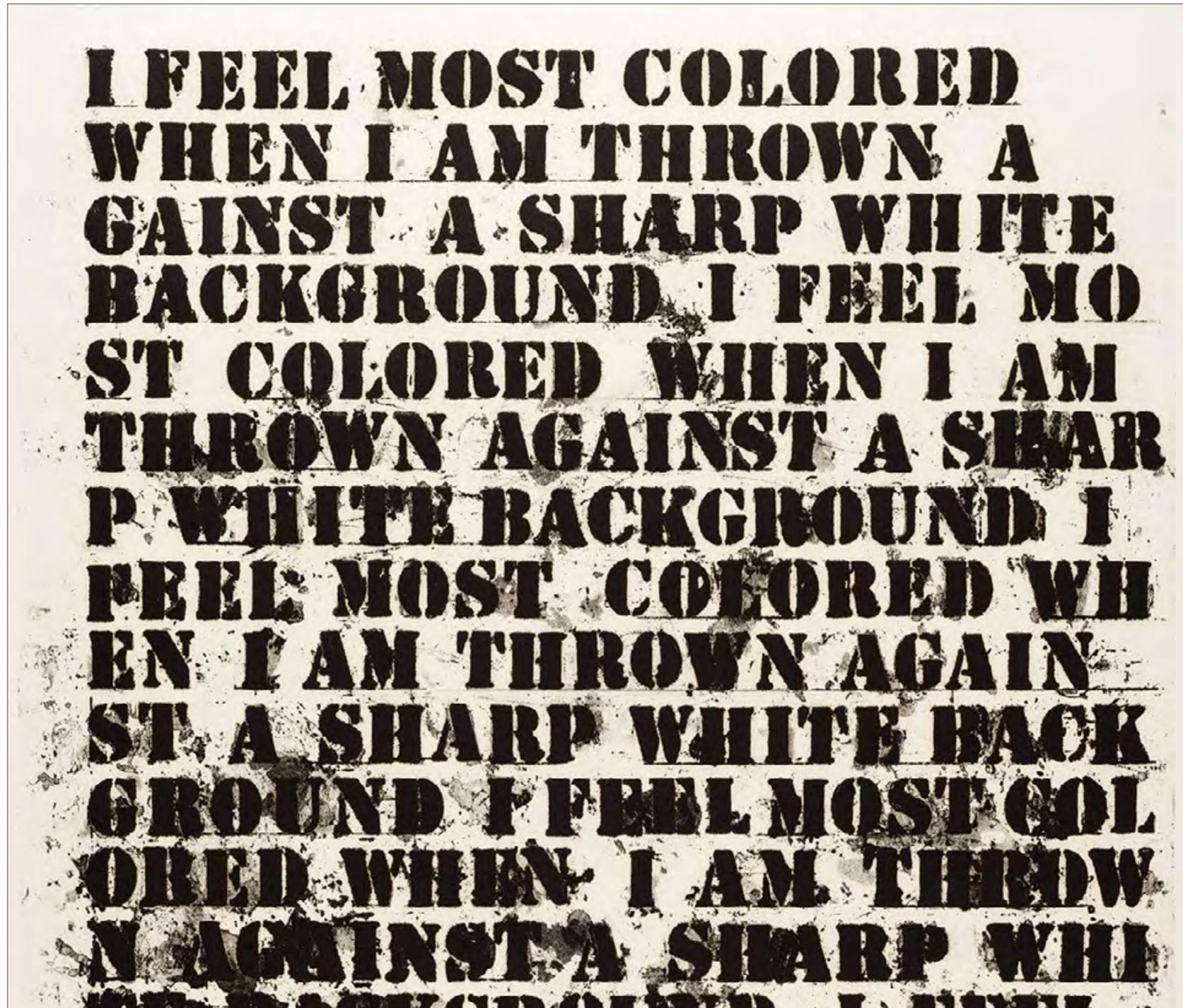
Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,
Michener Acquisitions Fund, 1969

© The Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation,
Seattle/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

A master storyteller and chronicler of history, Jacob Lawrence was one of the leading figurative painters of the twentieth century. He was also the preeminent African American artist of his generation, creating work characterized by strong, simplified forms, a distinctive palette of bold hues, and dynamic compositions that heighten the drama or tension of his tales. A childhood spent largely in Harlem during the years of the Great Depression provided him with subject matter that he returned to throughout his long career. Inspired by the vibrant artistic and intellectual energy that had fueled the Harlem Renaissance, Lawrence studied visual art at an early age, creating *The Eviction* when he was just seventeen years old. It shows a typical Harlem occurrence—a Black family thrown out of their home by a white landlord—a scene that, in a larger sense, reflects the overcrowding, poverty, and frequent displacements that the Great Depression caused throughout America's urban communities. But few painters were tracing the specific narratives of African American experience, and Lawrence vowed at a young age to remedy that situation. Even in such an early work, he forcefully communicated the immediacy of his story, simplified to its essences, with clear and unwavering vision.

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DETAIL



Glenn Ligon

I Feel Most Colored, 1992

Soft ground etching, 25 1/8 in. x 17 3/8 in.

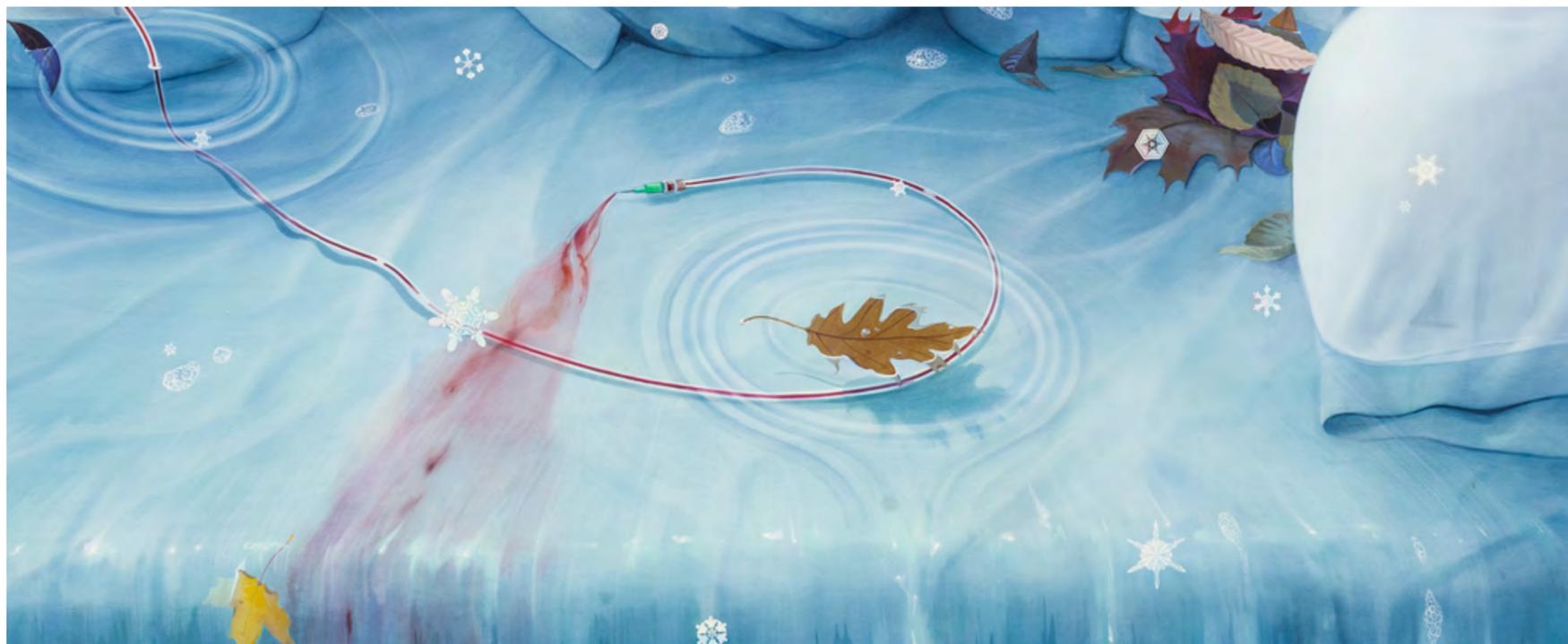
Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,
Bequest of John A. Robertson, 2018

© Glenn Ligon; Courtesy of the artist, Hauser & Wirth, New
York, Regen Projects, Los Angeles, Thomas Dane Gallery,
London and Chantal Crousel, Paris

Glenn Ligon is renowned for his works addressing racial and sexual identity. *I Feel Most Colored* relates to the artist's early series of paintings with black text against white backgrounds. The print is from the series *Untitled: Four Etchings*, with text from Ralph Ellison and Zora Neale Hurston. The text here is adapted from Hurston's 1928 essay *How It Feels to Be Colored Me* and exemplifies Ligon's ongoing exploration of word and image, especially as related to political and social expression. Describing his appreciation for Hurston's words, Ligon says, "They are meaningful in that they talk about the idea of race as a concept that is structured by context, rather than by essence."



DETAILS



Frank Moore

***Patient*, 1997-98**

**Oil on canvas over wood panel in artist's red pineframe,
49 1/2 in. x 65 1/2 in. x 3 1/2 in.**

**Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,
Gift of the Gesso Foundation, 2018**

© Estate of Frank Moore

In *Patient*, Frank Moore turns a hospital bed into a landscape of loss. Water pools over the sheets and cascades off the side of the bed like a waterfall. Symbols of the seasons—fall-colored leaves, snowflakes, and a songbird—suggest life cycles and the passing of time. Diagnosed as HIV-positive in 1987, Moore responded to the AIDS crisis through his art and as an activist. The snowflakes screen-printed onto this painting depict actual molecular structures, including the AIDS virus. As a key member of the organization Visual AIDS, he was instrumental in helping to create the red AIDS ribbon to help raise public awareness and empathy for those afflicted with the disease. *Patient* reflects an artist grappling not only with his own mortality (the hospital blood bag bears his own name and O+ blood type) but also mourning the loss of friends and loved ones who died of AIDS-related complications. He always aspired for his art to have universal resonance that, as he put it, “ultimately transcends the personal level and the specificity of issues such as gay and lesbian rights or AIDS.” In *Patient*, the bed is left empty for us to fill with our own memories of those whom we have lost.



DETAIL



Shirin Neshat

***Ghada*, 2013**

Digital chromogenic print, 26 in. x 17 1/2 in.

**Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,
Gift of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, 2018**

© Shirin Neshat

In 2012, Iranian artist Shirin Neshat and her collaborator Larry Barns took up residence in Cairo. Living near Tahrir Square—the center of Egypt’s Arab Spring uprisings months prior—the two encountered “grieving elderly and impoverished Egyptian men and women who [had] endured tremendous personal and national losses.” Neshat and Barns then photographed these Cairenes, drawing inspiration from their stories to imbue the final portraits with potent emotion. On view here are *Ghada* and *Sayed*, two examples from the series, titled *Our House Is on Fire*. Each portrait is overlaid with a thin veil of barely visible script. Written in Farsi and taken from various Iranian texts, Neshat’s calligraphy is deliberately almost indecipherable, to, in her words, “mirror the way in which national calamity has become embedded in and inseparable from [the subjects’] personal histories of tragedies.” As she elaborates, she is interested in the “intersection of an individual with the world, art and politics, poetry and violence.” These portraits were commissioned by the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation in 2012 as part of its Artist as Activist program. Established in 2011, the Artist as Activist initiative provides “resources to artists of all disciplines, including visual, performing, media, design, and other creative professions, who address important global challenges through their creative practice.” In 2015, the Foundation committed to gifting *Ghada* and *Sayed* to colleges and universities around the world. The University of Texas at Austin was one of thirty-six institutions to be awarded Neshat’s work.



DETAIL

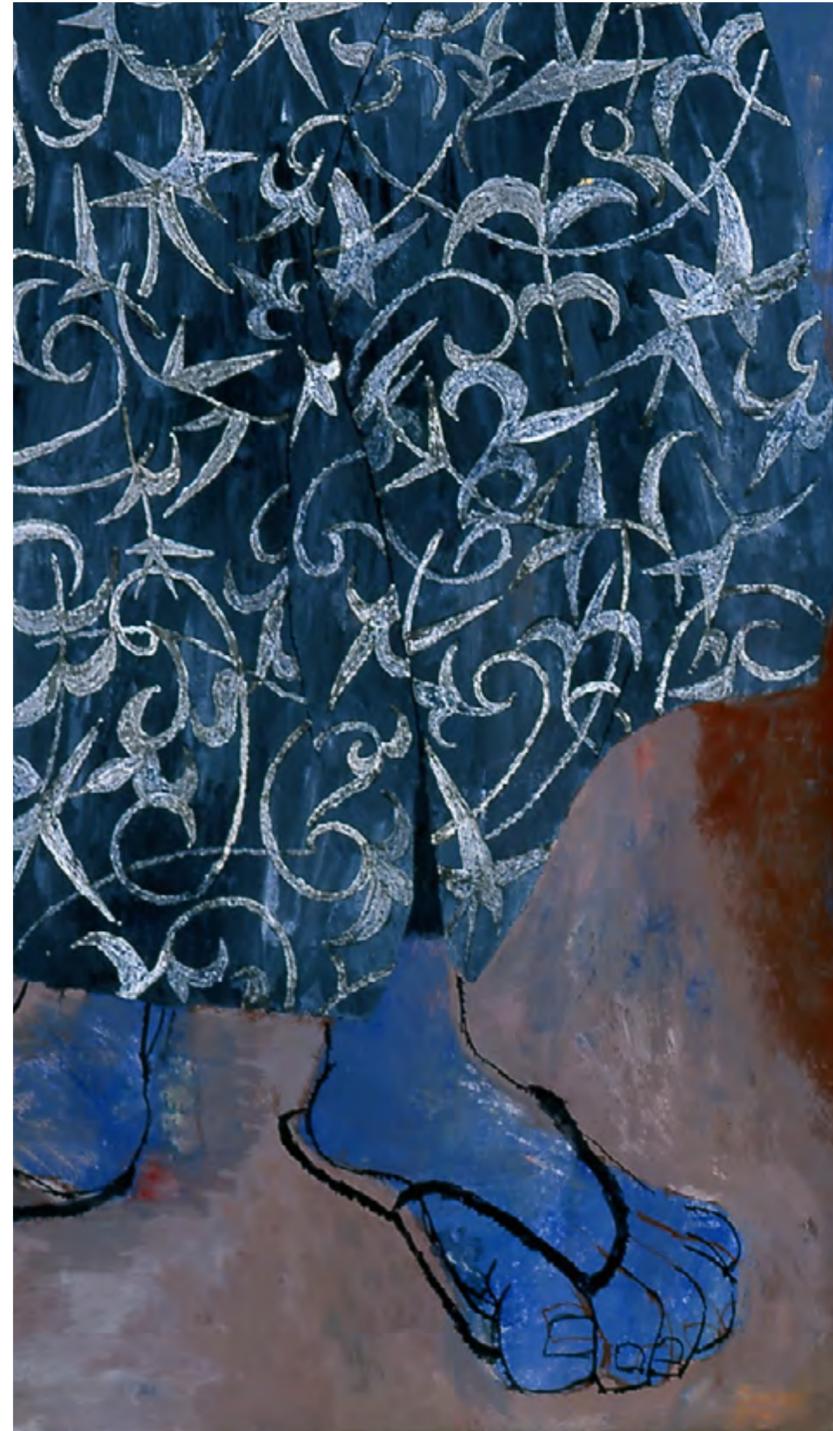


Catherine Opie
***Angela Scheirl*, 1993**
Chromogenic print, 25 13/16 in. x 21 5/8 in.
Promised gift of Michael Chessser, 2016
© Catherine Opie

One of the most celebrated American photographers working today, Catherine Opie first gained national recognition in the early 1990s for her intimate portraits of gender nonconforming friends and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender friends and loved ones. In this photograph, performer and filmmaker Hans Scheirl—whose work also addresses issues of sexuality and gender identity—sits confidently before the camera, photographed here a few years before his gender transition. The title of the work reflects his name at the time he sat for the portrait. The artist began this series of portraits at a time of great discrimination within the LGBT community. Opie chose to depict American sexual and gender minorities with great dignity and intimacy—a radical move amid the growing AIDS crisis of the 1990s. In works like *Angela Scheirl*, Opie allows her subjects to present themselves to the camera in their truest form.



DETAILS

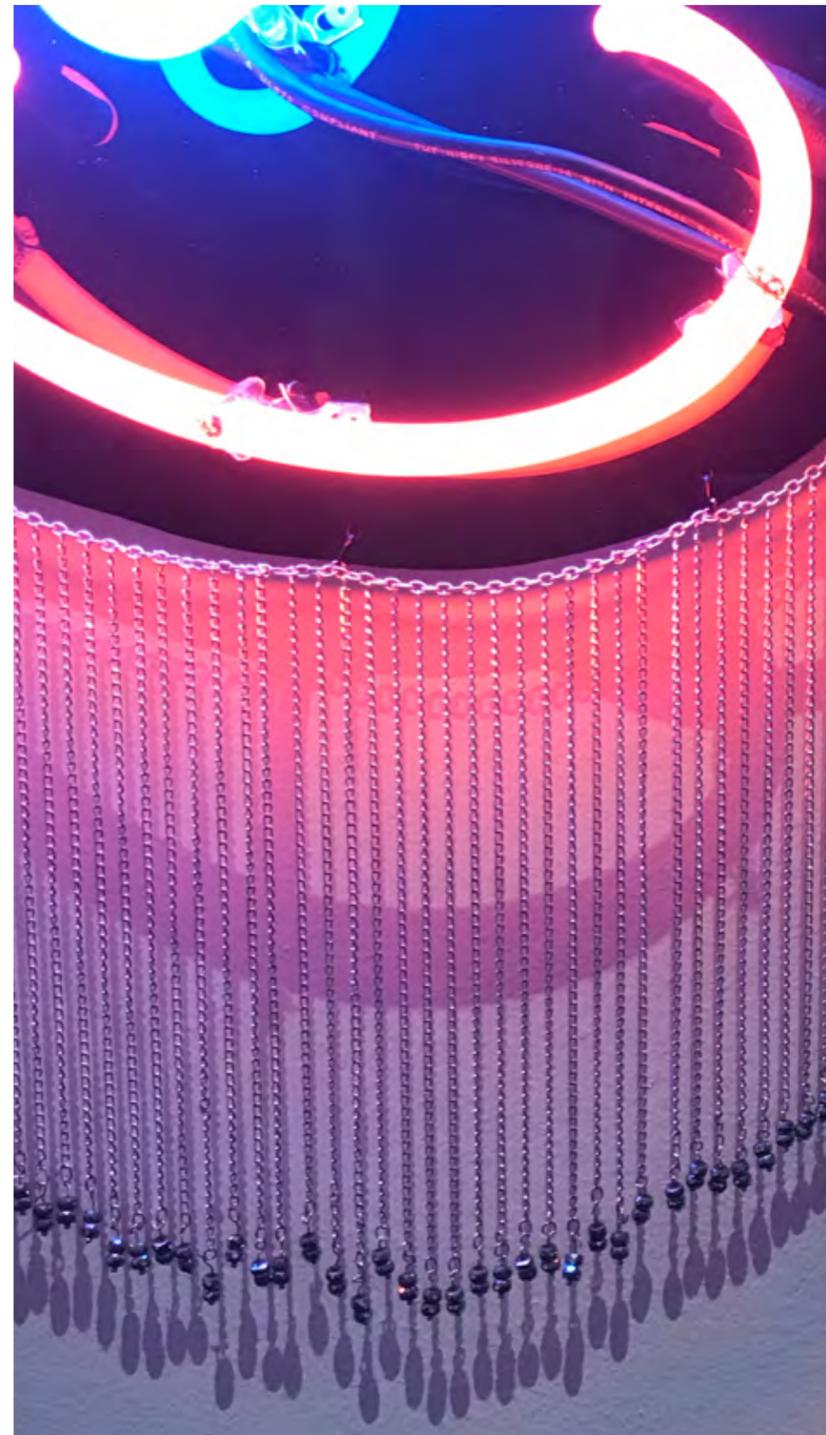


Ben Shahn
From That Day On, 1960
Oil and tempera on canvas on board,
71 1/2 in. x 35 3/8 in.
Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,
Gift of Mari and James A. Michener, 1991
Art © Estate of Ben Shahn / Licensed by VAGA at Artists
Rights Society (ARS), NY

The leading chronicler of social and political injustice in mid-century American painting, Ben Shahn was a persuasive artist whose bold works convey enormous compassion for human suffering. *From That Day On* belongs to the Lucky Dragon series of paintings that Shahn created to commemorate the deaths of the crew of the Lucky Dragon, a Japanese fishing boat caught in the radioactive cloud of a 1954 U.S. hydrogen bomb test in the Pacific. Shahn, who believed he could best illuminate universal tragedy by focusing on specifics, here has honored the fisherman Aikichi Kuboyama, who died seven months after the bomb blast. Kuboyama's burned and darkened flesh is juxtaposed with the tender new skin of his baby daughter. This shocking contrast, along with the representation of living plants in the decorative textile patterns, denotes the cycles of birth and death. Kuboyama's enormous, grievously wounded hands underscore his innocence and helplessness. A dragon emerging from a red cloud at the upper left reminds the viewer of the event itself, the role of fate (the dragon is often a symbol of destiny), and what Shahn called "the ineffable, unspeakable tragedy" of atomic power, whose threat to civilization weighed heavily on his thoughts in the last years of his life.



DETAIL



Cauleen Smith

Light Up Your Life (For Sandra Bland), 2019

Neon, Plexiglas, faceted hematite, and aluminum chain,
78 in. x 48 in.

Commissioned and produced by Artpace San Antonio.

Purchase through the generosity of an anonymous donor,
2020

© Cauleen Smith

Cauleen Smith's neon banner blinks "I will light you up" and "I will light up your life." Texas State Trooper Brian Encinia shouts the first statement at Sandra Bland, a Black woman, in a 2015 video of the rapidly escalating traffic stop that led to Bland's death in police custody. The latter phrase plays on the song title "You Light Up My Life," Debby Boone's saccharine 1977 hit, which was reinterpreted by Aretha Franklin and Whitney Houston. Smith's use of neon allows the reclamation and transformation of these phrases and imagining of alternative social conditions. Emblazoning the trooper's words in neon makes them unforgettable, insisting that we witness the cruelty of racist state violence, but we see them change into something positive, rooted in care for others. Smith writes: "I wanted to play with this threat, 'I will light you up,' by finding a response that neutralized it. . . . And so this flashing neon is a dance off, a sing-a-thon, a battle, a protest, a memento mori that collectivizes Sandra Bland's resistance, reclaims her sovereignty, and reifies the ways in which Black culture is inextricably woven into national identities and cultures." Smith was a professor in UT Austin's Department of Radio-Television-Film from 2001 to 2007. Her return to Texas for a residency at Artpace San Antonio, Bland's death, and the more recent police killings of Botham Jean and Atatiana Jefferson in their Dallas-Fort Worth homes prompted her to create this work.





Vincent Valdez

The City I, 2015-2016

Oil on canvas, 74 in. x 360 in.

Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin,
Purchase through the generosity of Guillermo C. Nicolas
and James C. Foster in honor of Jeanne and Michael Klein,
with additional support from Jeanne and Michael Klein and
Ellen Susman in honor of Jeanne and Michael Klein, 2017

© Vincent Valdez

Vincent Valdez's "The City I" (2015–16) is a four-part canvas that portrays a group in Ku Klux Klan robes and hoods on a bluff overlooking a metropolis at night. The black-and-white palette recalls the look of historical photographs and old movies, but details such as an iPhone, a can of Budweiser beer, and a new Chevrolet truck situate the work firmly in the present day. In spite of the work's unsettling subject matter, the group engages in seemingly familiar activities: a parent holds a child, a woman clutches a clipboard like a teacher keeping track of her students, and a man checks his phone. We have interrupted their gathering. The group looks warily at us as we look at them; no one appears to be welcome here. Beginning in the fall of 2015, Valdez worked for nearly a year to complete his "City" paintings. The scenes they depict are invented, but as the Texas artist points out, this underscores their continued relevance and ubiquity: "This could be any city in America. These individuals could be any Americans. There is a false sense that these threats were, or are, contained at the peripheries of society and in small rural communities. . . . It is possible that they are city politicians, police chiefs, parents, neighbors, community leaders, academics, church members, business owners, etcetera. This is the most frightening aspect of it all." The KKK has a long history of

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violent acts and intimidation targeting African Americans as well as Mexican Americans, immigrants, gays and lesbians, Jews, and Catholics. Valdez made his “City” paintings in response not only to the Klan, however, but also to the structural racism embedded in American cities and their design. “The City I” and “The City II” can also be understood as contemporary history paintings. Instead of responding to or commemorating a specific event, Valdez examines American history through a wider lens, looking at the ways that the past continues to inform the present. In doing so, he enters into dialogue—direct and indirect—with centuries of artists, writers, and musicians who have dealt with questions of identity, fear of the “other,” and the threat of violence. The inscription found in the lower-right corner, “For GSH and PG,” reveals two sources that helped inspire the work: Gil Scott-Heron’s powerful 1980 song, “The Klan,” and Philip Guston’s “City Limits,” a 1969 painting of cartoonish Klansmen that captivated Valdez when he saw it in an exhibition at the Blanton in 2015. “I am interested in the idea of this subject spanning three artists of diverse backgrounds and different generations,” Valdez explains. “How many more generations of American artists will need to tackle the subject of the Klan?” As the author James Baldwin reminds us, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” Valdez’s paintings encourage us to face this group and ask ourselves: Who exactly are “us” and “them”? Have things really changed or not? Valdez elaborates: “This is where we find ourselves in twenty-first-century America: stuck in an endless stare-down.”



DETAIL



Charles White

***I've Been 'Buked and I've Been Scorned*, 1956**

Compressed and vine charcoal with carbon pencil and charcoal wash splatter over traces of graphite pencil, 44 5/8 in. x 35 3/8 in.

Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Susan G. and Edmund W. Gordon to the units of Black Studies and the Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

© The Charles White Archives

Dedicated to the human form, White depicted single figures with extraordinary nuance. Here, the artist makes painstaking use of fine lines to capture an extraordinary range of textures in the hair, fabric, and wood in the composition. Women play a central role in White's paintings and drawings of the 1950s. Raised by a single mother and nurtured by his grandmother and aunts in the South, White reflected his upbringing in his depictions of strong women. He was also inspired by the radical Black feminist politics that surrounded him. *I've Been 'Buked and I've Been Scorned* takes its title from a 19th-century African American spiritual of the same name. The song lyricizes the pain and suffering endured by enslaved people. Presenting an intimidating maternal figure standing in her doorway, White underscores the strength not only of this particular woman but also of strong Black grandmothers over generations.