

# BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## BLANTON EXHIBITION EXPLORES ARTISTS' RESPONSE TO THE 1960s CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

*Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties*  
February 15 – May 10, 2015

*Presentation Includes Works by Sam Gilliam, Barkley Hendricks,  
Faith Ringgold, Richard Avedon, plus rarely-seen portrait of LBJ  
by Norman Rockwell*



Austin, TX—November 18, 2014—The Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin presents *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties*, an exhibition of approximately 100 works by 66 artists that explores how painting, sculpture, drawing, printmaking, and photography not only responded to the political and social turmoil of the era, but also helped influence its direction. Organized by the Brooklyn Museum in New York, the exhibition highlights the wide-ranging aesthetic approaches used to address the struggle for civil rights. The diverse group of artists in the exhibition includes, among others, Barkley Hendricks, Charles White, Andy Warhol, May Stevens, Philip Guston, Betye Saar, David Hammons, Jack Whitten, Danny Lyon, Romare Bearden and Faith Ringgold. Unique to the Blanton's presentation is the inclusion of a rarely-seen portrait of President Lyndon Baines Johnson by Norman Rockwell — a special loan from the LBJ Library and Museum.

“We are thrilled to partner with the Brooklyn Museum to bring this important exhibition to the Blanton,” says Blanton Director Simone Wicha. “The signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by President Johnson was a critical landmark in advancing equality within our society. *Witness* investigates the ways artists of the era responded to the movement by incorporating struggle, anger, power, and identity into their work. This exhibition and our

many related public programs invite the community to explore these compelling works and participate in the ongoing national dialogue.”

During the dramatic and often violent social and cultural upheaval of the 1960s, many artists aligned themselves with the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement to address the issues of the time in their art and, often, to participate in acts of protest. From this crucible emerged powerful works that were dramatically wide-ranging in aesthetic approach, encompassing abstraction, assemblage, figural work, Minimalism, Pop art, and photography. Creating works informed by the experience of inequality, conflict, and empowerment, artists tested the political viability of their styles through art that addressed resistance, self-definition, and blackness.

Organized thematically, the exhibition will include sections titled Integrate/Educate; American Nightmare; Presenting Evidence; Politicizing Pop; Black Is Beautiful; Sisterhood; Global Liberation; and Beloved Community. Among the works on view will be Jack Whitten’s *Birmingham 1964*, which was created in reaction to the famous race riots in that city and uses layers of black paint, crushed aluminum foil, and sheer stocking mesh to reveal and obscure a newspaper photograph of the confrontations between protesters and police in Birmingham. Also included are works by Charles Alston, Emma Amos, Merton Simpson, Norman Lewis, and Romare Bearden, all members of Spiral, a group of African American artists living in New York who collectively explored how their practices could engage with the struggle for civil rights.

Other highlights of the exhibition are Jae Jarrell’s *Urban Wall Suit*, a painted fabric suit inspired by activist murals and urban graffiti that anticipates the current confluence of fashion and art; Robert Indiana’s boldly graphic painting *The Confederacy: Alabama*, with a central map that references the violence-ridden Selma-to-Montgomery March; Barkley Hendricks’ *Lawdy Mama*, embodying the “black is beautiful” mantra by presenting a woman crowned with a halo-like afro in a golden altarpiece; Charles White’s powerful drawing, *Birmingham Totem*, which pays homage to the four girls who died in the 1963 church bombing and the two boys killed in the ensuing violence; works by the Georgia-born, New York-based artist Benny Andrews, whose images of rural African Americans incorporate coarse fabrics in densely painted surfaces; and Sam Gilliam’s *Red April*, a monumental abstract painting that he made in response to Dr. Martin Luther King’s assassination on April 4, 1968.

Photographers in the exhibition, such as Richard Avedon, Bruce Davidson, Roy DeCarava, Danny Lyon, Gordon Parks, and Moneta Sleet Jr., captured the events of the Civil Rights Movement as both documentarians and activists, often influencing public opinion with their images in newspapers and magazines such as *Ebony* and *Life*. Among other photographs, the exhibition features Danny Lyon’s image of Bob Dylan playing his guitar before a group of SNCC workers outside their Greenwood, Mississippi office and Gordon Parks’ images of Muhammad Ali, Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver, and other public figures.

A gallery will be dedicated to a video of Nina Simone’s famous 1964 performance of “Mississippi Goddam,” a powerful protest song that became an anthem of the Civil Rights Movement. Simone wrote the song in response to the murder of Medgar Evers in Mississippi and other racially-motivated killings of African Americans in the South.

In March 2015, the Blanton will co-host a panel discussion on the Civil Rights Movement with the University of Texas' LBJ Library and Museum and Dolph Briscoe Center for American History. In addition, the following programs, among others, have been organized:

**Film Screening | Thursday, February 19, 6:30 p.m.**

*Eyes on the Prize: The Promised Land* (60 minutes) Covers the last year of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and the turn of the Civil Rights Movement toward addressing economic inequality. Conversation with film director Paul Stekler follows.

**Blanton Perspectives | Sunday, February 22, 2 p.m.**

Artist Jack Whitten and *Witness* co-curator Kellie Jones discuss the works and themes of the exhibition, with a focus on Whitten's work and the development of his practice since the 1960s.

Funding provided by the Carolyn Harris Hynson Centennial Endowment.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue published by the Monacelli Press. It includes essays by co-curators Teresa A. Carbone and Kellie Jones, with additional contributions by Cynthia A. Young, Connie H. Choi, and Dalila Scruggs.

***Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties*** is organized by the Brooklyn Museum and made possible by the Ford Foundation.



Generous funding for this exhibition at the Blanton is provided by Jeanne and Michael Klein, with additional support from Chase, Nancy and Bob Inman, and a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts.

The exhibition was organized by Teresa A. Carbone, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of American Art at the Brooklyn Museum, and Kellie Jones, Associate Professor in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University.

**About the Blanton Museum of Art**

Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art is one of the foremost university art museums in the country and holds the largest public collection in Central Texas. Recognized for its modern and contemporary American and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance and baroque paintings, and encyclopedic collection of prints and drawings, the Blanton offers thought-provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art.

The museum is located at the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Congress Avenue and is open Tuesday through Friday from 10-5, Saturday from 11-5, and Sunday from 1-5. Thursdays are free admission days and every third Thursday the museum is open until 9. Admission Prices: Adults \$9, Kids 12 and under FREE, Seniors (65+) \$7, Youth/College Students (13-21) \$5. Admission is free to members, all current UT ID-holders. For additional information call (512) 471-7324 or visit [www.blantonmuseum.org](http://www.blantonmuseum.org)

Image captions:

Barkley L. Hendricks

*Lawdy Mama*, 1969

Oil and gold leaf on canvas

53 3/4 x 36 1/4 in.

The Studio Museum in Harlem, Gift of Stuart Liebman, in memory of Joseph B. Liebman, 83.25. © 2014 Barkley L. Hendricks. Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Barbara Jones-Hogu

*Unite*, 1971

Silkscreen with ink on wove paper

22 1/2 x 30 in.

Brooklyn Museum, Dick S. Ramsay Fund, 2012.46 © 2014 Barbara Jones-Hogu

Edward Kienholz

*It Takes Two to Integrate (Cha, Cha, Cha)*, 1961

Painted dolls, dried fish, glass in wooden box

31 1/4 x 22 1/2 x 7 1/2 in.

Collection of David R. Packard and M. Bernadette Castor, Portola Valley, CA, EK11-6.

© Kienholz. Photo: Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, California

Jae Jarrell

*Urban Wall Suit*, ca. 1969

Sewn and painted cotton and silk, two-piece suit

37 1/2 x 27 1/2 x 1/2 in.

Brooklyn Museum, Gift of R.M. Atwater, Anna Wolfrom Dove, Alice Fiebiger, Joseph Fiebiger, Belle Campbell Harriss, and Emma L. Hyde, by exchange; Designated Purchase Fund, Mary Smith Dorward Fund, Dick S. Ramsay Fund, and Carll H. de Silver Fund, 2012.80.16. © 2014 Jae Jarrell