

***We Wanted a Revolution:
Black Radical Women,
1965-85***

Object Labels

Faith Ringgold

(Born 1930 in New York)

For the Women's House, 1971

Oil on canvas

New York City Department of Correction, Rose M. Singer Center,
East Elmhurst, New York

Faith Ringgold dedicated *For the Women's House* to the women incarcerated in the Correctional Institution for Women on Rikers Island, New York, in January 1972. It remained on view until the facility became a male prison in 1988. Deemed inappropriate for the incoming male prisoners, the mural was whitewashed, but later saved by a guard, restored, and reinstalled in the new women's prison, the Rose M. Singer Center, in Queens, New York, where it remains on view.

Imagining the first female president and professional women basketball players among other positive female role models, *For the Women's House* incorporates suggestions offered to Ringgold by the incarcerated women. The play on words in the imaginary route and destination of the bus in the upper quadrant—"2A Sojourner Truth Square"—speaks to the "long road leading out of here" that the women had asked to see depicted.

In an April 1972 interview with her daughter, writer Michele Wallace, Ringgold described her goals for the piece: "If I hadn't done it for the Women's House then it probably would have been more political; but these women have been rejected by society; they are the blood guilt of society, so if this is what I give them, then maybe that is what we should all have. Maybe all that other stuff we're talking about is jive because these women are real. They don't have anything to be unreal about."

Maren Hassinger

(Born 1947 in Los Angeles)

Leaning, 1980

Wire rope and wire

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of The Modern Women's Fund and Ronnie Heyman, 2018

A supporter of the growing Environmental Movement, which began in the early 1970s, sculptor and performance artist Maren Hassinger evoked an artificial landscape within the elegantly minimal sculptural environment of *Leaning*. Bush-like forms made from twisted, welded, and bent wire rope build a complex site for collective and personal reflection. Transforming industrial detritus into an abstract and formally rigorous garden, Hassinger creates a contemplative experience that is charged with different meanings—the natural versus artificial, and the personal versus communal.

Elizabeth Catlett

(Born 1915 in Washington, DC; died 2012 in Cuernavaca, Mexico)

***Target*, 1970**

Bronze

Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana

Elizabeth Catlett's career began in the Depression era of the 1930s, when she participated in the New Deal program called the Public Works of Art Project. Her artwork, however, was not regularly exhibited until the 1960s, when the Civil Rights Movement drew new audiences to her prints of revolutionary figures such as Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X. Catlett employed the immediacy and legibility of the graphic arts to address sociopolitical causes in the United States and in Mexico, where she lived and worked. She made *Target* in response to the killing of Black Panther activists Fred Hampton and Mark Clark by Chicago police officers in December 1969. Using the crosshairs of a riflescope as a framing device, the artist indicates the viewer's complicity as a witness to injustice.

Jae Jarrell

(Born 1935 in Cleveland, Ohio)

Ebony Family, c. 1968

Velvet dress with velvet collage

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, 2012.80.15

Urban Wall Suit, c. 1969

Sewn and painted cotton and silk, two-piece suit

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

As one of the co-founders of the Black Arts Movement collective AfriCOBRA—formed in 1968 in Chicago—fashion designer Jae Jarrell made one-of-a-kind clothing using the bright hues the collective called “Coolade” colors, a wordplay on a popular children’s beverage. Jarrell’s vibrant garments, which the artist wore in her daily life, exalt black families and culture. She wrote that her *Ebony Family* dress “always got good vibes from our [AfriCOBRA] members, no doubt, because my political stance on nurturing the strong loving Black family is real, and personally experienced. We regarded the members as extended family.”



Jae Jarrell wearing *Urban Wall Suit* with two of her children

Emma Amos

(Born 1938 in Atlanta)

Flower Sniffer, 1966

Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum. William K. Jacobs, Jr. Fund, 2017.35

“For me, a black woman artist, to walk into the studio, is a political act.”
—Emma Amos

Emma Amos was the youngest member—and only woman—of the New York collective Spiral, assembled as a support and networking group for black artists interested in social change. Spiral sought space and greater visibility for black artists in a racist art world, and its members debated art’s role in political activism. In this self-portrait, Amos presents herself alone in a vast, abstract field of paint, simply enjoying the fragrance of flowers. The artist nonetheless steadily returns the viewer’s gaze, asserting and defining her own place within her work.

Emma Amos

(Born 1938 in Atlanta)

Sandy and Her Husband, 1973

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist and Ryan Lee Gallery, New York

Emma Amos was raised in Atlanta, Georgia, where her family was involved in the rich cultural scene cultivated by African American colleges, businesses, and community leaders in the face of the legal segregation of the time. Relocating to New York in 1960, Amos found herself closed off from the art world owing to her race and gender, both of which are exalted in *Sandy and Her Husband*. Utterly of its moment, Amos's depiction of the happy couple in her apartment spotlights contemporaneous fashions as well as another of her own paintings, *Flower Sniffer* (1966), also on view in this gallery. The combination of vibrant color and patterns presages Amos's later use of African *kangas* (type of garment or fabric with origins in East Africa), Dutch wax prints (a fabric style popular on the African continent distributed by the Dutch colonial empire), and other textiles in her figurative paintings of the 1980s.

Lois Mailou Jones

(Born 1905 in Boston; died 1998 in Washington, D.C.)

Ubi Girl from Tai Region, 1972

Acrylic on canvas

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The Hayden Collection—Charles Henry Hayden Fund, 1974.410

A pioneer of the explosive creative moment in the 1920s known as the Harlem Renaissance, and a professor of visual art at Howard University in Washington, D.C., from 1930 to 1977, Lois Mailou Jones was part of an older generation of artists whose work remained influential for younger artists involved in the Black Arts Movement. Inspired by decades of work in Haiti and research on artists of the African diaspora, Jones traveled extensively throughout Africa in the late 1960s and 1970s to conduct research and meet contemporary artists. She made both works on view here, *Ubi Girl from Tai Region* and *Ode to Kinshasa* also on view in this gallery, during her travels to Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Inspired by the arts and cultures she was experiencing firsthand in Africa, they also reflect the Black Arts Movement's engagement with African imagery.

Lois Mailou Jones

(Born 1905 in Boston; died 1998 in Washington, D.C.)

Ode to Kinshasa, 1972

Mixed media on canvas

National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.

Gift of the artist, 1997.105

Rudy Irwin (Baba Kachenga)

(Birth year and place unavailable; died 1969)

WEUSI Art Creators, early 1970s

Painting on terry cloth

Collection of Ronald Pyatt and Shelley Inniss

The artist collective Weusi (a word meaning “blackness” in Swahili) was largely made up of male artists who worked out of their cooperative gallery, Nyumba Ya Sanaa (“House of Art”) in Harlem, New York. As one of the key groups of the Black Arts Movement, they expressed African themes and imagery, and political solidarity with the Black Power Movement. Kay Brown, one of the founders of the Where We At collective, was the sole woman in Weusi for three years, serving as the assistant to the directors and the official secretary of the group. Fellow Where We Art artist Dindga McCannon was also a member. This painting appears in the group portrait of the collective included in this gallery.

AfriCOBRA 1: Ten in Search of a Nation; Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists, September 13-October 4, 1970, 1970

Printed poster

Collection of David Lusenhop



Back of *AfriCOBRA 1* poster

Far left:

Kay Brown

(Born 1932 in New York; died 2012 in Washington, D.C.)

Kick of Life, c.1974

Etching and aquatint on paper

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, 2012.80.9

From left to right, top to bottom:

Kay Brown

Willowbrook, 1972

Etching on paper

Collection of Ronald Pyatt and Shelley Inniss

Carole Byard

(Born 1941 in Atlantic City; died 2017 in Petersburg, New Jersey)

Yasmina and the Moon, 1975

Block print on paper

Collection of Alexis De Veaux

Kay Brown

She Sees No Evil; She Hears No Evil; She Speaks No Evil, 1982

Collage on paper

Sister with Braids, late 1960s–early 1970s

Etching on paper

Collection of Ronald Pyatt and Shelley Inniss

Like the personal moments captured in her other print on display, *Kick of Life* (circa 1974), Where We At member Kay Brown's work reflects her stoicism in the face of difficult life experiences. The etching *Willowbrook* bears the name of a state-supported institution for children with intellectual disabilities; it was located on Staten Island, New York from 1947 until its forced closure in 1987. New York State Senator Robert Kennedy once famously called it a "snake pit." Brown's son lived at Willowbrook during the time it was under scrutiny for unsafe conditions and fraudulent practices.

Dindga McCannon

(Born 1947 in New York)

Empress Akweke, 1975

Acrylic on canvas

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, 2012.80.31

Dindga McCannon painted this portrait of fellow Where We At artist Akweke Singho.

Dindga McCannon

(Born 1947 in New York)

Revolutionary Sister, 1971

Mixed media on wood

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, 2012.80.32

Dindga McCannon wrote about her inspiration for making *Revolutionary Sister*:

“In the 60’s and 70’s we didn’t have many women warriors (that we were aware of) so I created my own. Her headpiece is made from recycled mini flag poles. The shape was inspired by my thoughts on the statue of liberty; she represents freedom for so many but what about us (African Americans)? My warrior is made from pieces from the hardware store—another place women were not welcomed back then. My thoughts were my warrior is hard as nails. I used a lot of the liberation colors: red—for the blood we shed; green—for the Motherland—Africa; and black—for the people. The bullet belt validates her warrior status. She doesn’t need a gun; the power of change exists within her. The belt was mine. In the early 70’s bullet belts were a fashion statement, I think inspired by the blaxploitation movies of the time. I couldn’t afford the metal belts, probably purchased at army navy surplus stores, so I made do with a plastic one.”

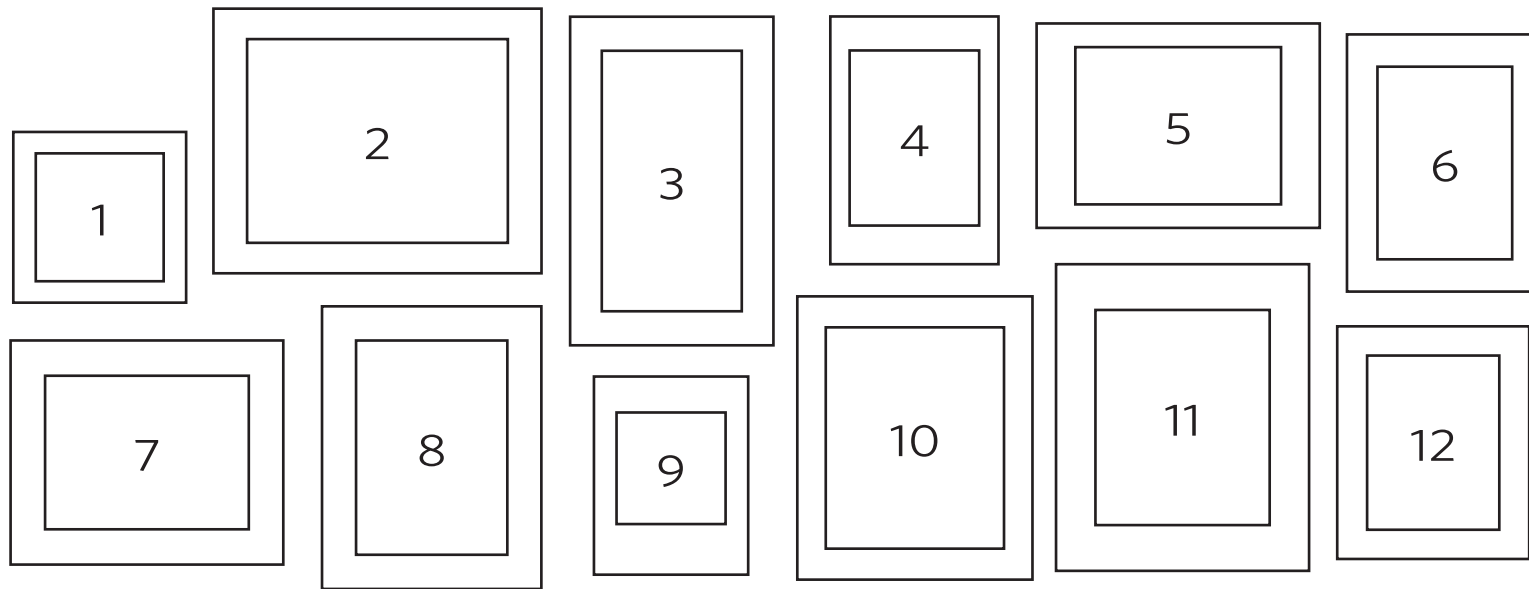
Carole Byard

(Born 1941 in Atlantic City; died 2017 in Petersburg, New Jersey)

Yasmina and the Moon, 1975

Block print on paper

Collection of Alexis De Veaux



1.

Samella Lewis

(Born 1924 in New Orleans)

Sister Shango, 1975

Graphite on paper

Collection of Kathleen O'Brien Wicker

2.

Barbara Jones-Hogu

(Born 1938 in Chicago; died 2017 in Chicago)

Relate to Your Heritage, 1971

Screenprint on paper

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, 2012.80.26

3.

Barbara Jones-Hogu

(Born 1938 in Chicago; died 2017 in Chicago)

Black Men We Need You, c. 1971

Screenprint on paper

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, 2012.80.23

4.

Elizabeth Catlett

(Born 1915 in Washington, DC; died 2012 in Cuernavaca, Mexico)

Madonna, 1982

Lithograph on paper

Scripps College, Claremont, California.
Gift of Samella Lewis

5.

Barbara Jones-Hogu

(Born 1938 in Chicago; died 2017 in Chicago)

I'm Better Than These Motherfuckers, c. 1970

Screenprint on colored paper

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, 2012.80.24

6.

Emma Amos

(Born 1938 in Atlanta)

Summer 1968, 1968

Silkscreen

Courtesy the artist and Ryan Lee Gallery, New York

7.

Barbara Jones-Hogu

(Born 1938 in Chicago; died 2017 in Chicago)

Unite, 1971

Screenprint on paper

Brooklyn Museum. Dick S. Ramsay Fund, 2012.46

8.

Jeff Donaldson

(Born 1932 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas; died 2004 in Washington, D.C.)

Wives of Shango, 1969

Watercolor with mixed media on paper

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, 2012.80.13

9.

Samella Lewis

(Born 1924 in New Orleans) Family, 1967

Family, 1967

Lithograph on paper

Oakland Museum of California. Museum Income Purchase Fund, A72.197

10.

Wadsworth A. Jarrell

(Born 1929 in Albany, Georgia)

Revolutionary (Angela Davis), 1971

Screenprint on paper

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, 2012.80.18

11.

Carolyn Lawrence

(Born 1940 in United States)

Uphold Your Men, 1971

Screenprint on paper

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, 2012.80.27

12.

Samella Lewis

(Born 1924 in New Orleans)

Field, 1968

Woodcut

Scripps College, Claremont, California

Faith Ringgold

(Born 1930 in New York)

Early Works #25: Self-Portrait, 1965

Oil on canvas

Brooklyn Museum. Gift of Elizabeth A. Sackler, 2013.96

Faith Ringgold completed this self-portrait at the beginning of her career, concurrent with the rise of the Black Power and other radical political movements of the 1960s. Alluding to the hard-edged, mechanical line favored by pop artists and the psychologically acute portraiture of Pablo Picasso, the artist portrays herself with a determined gaze and folded arms, in a gesture simultaneously gentle and guarded. In reflecting on this painting and the political and artistic awakening she experienced during this time, Ringgold has said, "I was trying to find my voice, talking to myself through my art."

Barbara Chase-Riboud

(Born 1939 in Philadelphia)

Pushkin, 1985

Polished bronze and silk

Courtesy the artist and Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York

Having settled in Paris in 1960, Barbara Chase-Riboud was physically removed from the Black Arts Movement. However, her works—monumental abstract sculptures that combine metal and fiber, such as *Pushkin*—speak to larger social issues resonant with the movement.

Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation, founded by Faith Ringgold and her daughters Michele Wallace and Barbara Wallace, protested the lack of women and people of color in the Whitney Museum of American Art's influential Annual Exhibition in 1970. As a direct result of their activism, Chase-Riboud and Betye Saar became the first African American women to show at the Whitney.

Faith Ringgold

(Born 1930 in New York)

Feminist Series #10/20: Of My Two Handicaps, 1972

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of ACA Galleries, New York

Faith Ringgold's *Feminist Series* features quotations from important African American women, such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, combining language and gestural painting to evoke the complex experiences of black women in the United States. The title of this work comes from a quote by Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman elected to the U.S. Congress in 1968: "Of my two 'handicaps' being female put more obstacles in my path than being black." In the year Ringgold painted this work, Chisholm also became the first black candidate for a major party's nomination for president and the first woman to run for chair of the Democratic Party. The artist blends African American quilting techniques, Tibetan *thangka* paintings of Buddhist deities, and Chisholm's own words in a colorful tribute to her pioneering breakthrough at the intersection of gender, race, and politics.

Betye Saar

(Born 1926 in Los Angeles)

Colored Spade, 1971

Video (color, sound; 1:19 minutes)

Courtesy of Roberts & Tilton Gallery, Culver City, California

Betye Saar's short film *Colored Spade* combines a song from the 1968 hit Broadway show *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* with a mash-up of derogatory images of people of color as well as images of black power and solidarity at the end of the film. Made the year before she began her incendiary series *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, the film demonstrates the origins of her interest in deconstructing racist representations of people of color in popular culture and politics. The exhibition is the first public screening of *Colored Spade* since its inclusion in the Brockman Gallery Film Festival in Los Angeles in 1975.

Betye Saar

(Born 1926 in Los Angeles)

Shield of Quality, 1974

Newark Museum. Purchase 1998 The Members' Fund, 98.37

The Liberation of Aunt Jemima: Cocktail, 1973

Brooklyn Museum. Purchased with funds given by Elizabeth A. Sackler, gift of the Contemporary Art Committee, and William K. Jacobs, Jr. Fund

Mixed-media assemblages

Betye Saar's *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima: Cocktail* combines the iconography of the Black Power Movement, political violence, and aspirational middle-class American culture to critique the racist stereotypes of black femininity and speak to the revolutionary aims of Black Liberation movements. Featuring a handmade label with a "mammy" figure on the front and a Black Power fist on the back, the ubiquitous California wine-jug-turned-Molotov-cocktail wryly comments on the potential and promise of armed resistance to oppression.

Betye Saar

(Born 1926 in Los Angeles)

Floating Figure with Seven Spades, 1977

Mixed media on handkerchief

California African American Museum, Los Angeles. Gift of the Wives of the Bench and Bar, 1983.33

Janet Henry

(Born 1947 in New York)

Untitled, for Heresies #15: Racism Is the Issue, 1982

Cut-paper collage, ink, correction fluid, and adhesive on paper
mounted on illustration board

Courtesy the artist

Emma Amos

(Born 1938 in Atlanta)

Preparing for a Face Lift, 1981

Etching and crayon on paper

Courtesy the artist and Ryan Lee Gallery, New York

Emma Amos's wry work on paper mimics several tropes of fashion magazines, transferring the advice column model of self-improvement to her experience as a black woman trying to make it in the art world. Here she scrutinizes the physical toll of racism and sexism and the tyranny of cultural expectations for women's beauty.

Virginia Jaramillo

(Born 1939 in El Paso, Texas)

Visual Theorem, 1984

Linen rag fiber with earth pigments

Courtesy the artist and Hales Gallery, London and New York

Part of Virginia Jaramillo's *Visual Theorems* series, this work was first shown in 1984 as part of the group exhibition *Women Artists in the 80s: New Talent* at New York's A.I.R. Gallery. In 1979, Jaramillo was co-editor of an issue of *Heresies* that looked specifically at the experiences of women of color in the mainstream Feminist Movement and art world. That issue, *Third World Women—The Politics of Being Other*, featured a similar work by Jaramillo, *Visual Theorems #170* (1979).

Faith Ringgold

(Born 1930 in New York)

The Judson 3, 1970

Silkscreen

Courtesy of ACA Galleries, New York

People's Flag Show Poster, 1970

Cut-paper collage and pen

Collection of Beth Rudin DeWoody

In November 1970, *People's Flag Show* was held at New York's Judson Memorial Church. The exhibition was designed as an open call for artworks interpreting the U.S. flag, in a direct remonstrance of laws limiting its use and display. More than 150 works filled the church, many inherently political or even incendiary in their manipulation of the flag. After a performance in which a flag was burned, three of the organizing artists—Jon Hendricks, Faith Ringgold, and Jean Toche, dubbed "the Judson Three"—were arrested and subsequently charged with desecration of the U.S. flag. A protracted, costly, and ultimately failed legal battle ensued over the fundamental right of artistic license. Ringgold designed *People's Flag Show Poster* to publicize the exhibition and the silkscreen *The Judson 3* during the subsequent legal battle.

Faith Ringgold

(Born 1930 in New York)

Woman Free Yourself, 1971

Cut-paper collage

Collection of Beth Rudin DeWoody

Beverly Buchanan

(Born 1940 in Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina; died 2015 in Ann Arbor, Michigan)

Wall Column, 1980

Painted cast concrete

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, Mrs. Wilson Nolen Gift, 1981, 1981.8a-d

After receiving a master's degree in public health from Columbia University in 1969, Beverly Buchanan traded her ambition to become a doctor for a working career as an artist, living in New York until 1977. Buchanan explored the cultural and social history of sites and ruins, coupling a poignant sense of the transience of historical memory with an active engagement with postminimalism and land art. *Wall Column*, which was included in the *Dialectics of Isolation* exhibition, was acquired by The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Lowery Stokes Sims, who was a curator at the museum in the 1980s, brought the work into the collection. As Sims recalls: "I was impressed by the relationship of her conceptual approach to the seductions of the landscape and the engagement of materials that resonated with historical art making by African Americans in the South."

Ana Mendieta

(Born 1948 in Havana, Cuba; died 1985 in New York)

Untitled (Facial Cosmetic Variations), 1972

Chromogenic color prints

Courtesy the Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC and Galerie
Lelong, New York

Janet Henry

(Born 1947 in New York)

Juju Bag for a White Protestant Male, 1979-80

Mixed media, clear vinyl, toys, and dolls

The Annual Trip Home Christian Cullid Lady, 1981

Mixed media

Courtesy the artist

Janet Henry's *Juju Bag* series demonstrates the complex layering in the stories we create to describe ourselves. The artist imagines a white Protestant male whose persona is crafted from a pair of rowing oars, a cable-knit sweater, and a neatly dressed female companion with a shopping cart in tow, among other items. Here Henry draws on the visual lexicon of children's play and alludes to both West African beliefs and exclusionary social systems in the United States.

Howardena Pindell

(Born 1943 in Philadelphia)

Free, White and 21, 1980

Video (color, sound; 12:15 minutes)

Courtesy the artist and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York

"I had faced de facto censorship issues throughout my life as part of the system of apartheid in the United States. In the tape I was bristling at the women's movement as well as at the artworld and some of the usual offensive encounters that were heaped on top of the racism of my profession."

So wrote Howardena Pindell in 1992 about *Free, White and 21*. This intensely personal and political film, whose title comes from a rebellious catchphrase often heard in Hollywood movies of the 1930s and '40s, was a stark departure from the abstract works on paper for which she was primarily known. The film was first shown in *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*, curated by artist Ana Mendieta at New York's A.I.R. Gallery in 1980.

Virginia Jaramillo

(Born 1939 in El Paso, Texas)

Untitled, 1971

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy the artist and Hales Gallery, London and New York

After relocating to New York from Los Angeles in the mid-1960s, Virginia Jaramillo's work evolved in response to her new environment and artistic community. In a studio on Spring Street in SoHo, a neighborhood in Lower Manhattan, she began to produce paintings bold in scale, composition, and formal experimentation, reacting to the gestural nature of abstract expressionism. The precision of the curves in her paintings and the flatness of the paintings' surfaces demonstrate Jaramillo's affinities with hard-edged painting and minimalism.

Senga Nengudi

(Born 1943 in Chicago)

Ceremony for Freeway Fets, 1978

Photographs by Roderick Quaku Young

Chromogenic color prints

Courtesy the artist, Lévy Gorvy, New York, and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

In March 1978, a group of artists known as Studio Z came together under a freeway overpass in Los Angeles to activate Senga Nengudi's first public performance, the environmental installation *Freeway Fets*. Participants in the improvisatory gathering included the artists Houston Conwill, David Hammons, Maren Hassinger, Ulysses Jenkins, Franklin Parker, Joe Ray, and RoHo, among others, with the event captured by photographer Roderick Kwaku Young and filmmaker Barbara McCullough. The performance included elements of African masquerade with participants wearing Nengudi's sculptures as costumes while dancing and playing musical instruments. The artist viewed the work as a symbolic vehicle for healing divisions between black men and women. Describing the piece's concept and realization, Nengudi said:

"Some of the forms and columns were representative of male energy, the others of female energy. On one column I inscribed names of our children, on another the names of ancestors, relatives, and personal friends, some of whom succumbed to the disease of being black in America. I had grave concerns about the tenuous relationships between black men and women. I wished to portray myself as a uniting spirit, a harmonizing spirit between those two factions. I asked David Hammons to be representative of male energy and Maren Hassinger to be representative of female energy As I gave myself up to the music and the situation, I became other than myself. The concept took over and fulfilled itself."

Barbara McCullough

(Born 1945 in New Orleans)

Water Ritual #1: An Urban Rite of Purification, 1979

Video (black and white, sound; 4:00 minutes)

Third World Newsreel, New York

Filmed in an abandoned area in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, Barbara McCullough's *Water Ritual #1: An Urban Rite of Purification* evokes spiritual and cosmological practices of African diaspora communities. After performing a series of ritualistic movements, the female character Milanda, played by Yolanda Vidato, symbolically purifies her own body and the neglected urban landscape she finds herself in by urinating inside a ruined building. McCullough was part of the L.A. Rebellion at the University of California, Los Angeles, a group of black film students who worked closely together over the two decades following the 1965 Watts Uprising—the largest urban rebellion of the Civil Rights era in the predominantly black neighborhood of Watts, instigated by the arrest of a young African American man by white police officers. RoHo, one of the cinematographers for *Water Ritual #1*, was also involved in Senga Nengudi's *Freeway Fets* performance, which is similarly set in a desolate area of Los Angeles.

Janet Henry

(Born 1947 in New York)

Cover design for *Black Currant* #1, 1982

Mechanical reproduction; acetate and rubber cement on Bristol board

Courtesy the artist

After Just Above Midtown Gallery moved to Franklin Street from West 57th Street in New York, Linda Goode Bryant and artist Janet Henry began producing *Black Currant* to chronicle the artistic community of the gallery. The publication was dedicated to the experimental spirit of JAM and the artists it championed. Once the gallery moved to its final location, at 503 Broadway in New York, *Black Currant* became *B Culture* and was edited by writer and musician Greg Tate and others.

Camille Billops

(Born 1933 in Los Angeles)

Had I Know, 1973

Print

Just Above Midtown Archive

Howardena Pindell

(Born 1943 in Philadelphia)

From left to right:

Untitled, 1969

Acrylic on canvas

Carnival at Ostende, 1977

Mixed media on canvas

Untitled, 1972

Acrylic on canvas

All courtesy the artist and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York

Howardena Pindell's paintings from this period appear as austere color fields from afar, but their dense complexity is revealed by closer inspection. Pindell pushed or sprayed paint through stenciled or hole-punched paper templates, accumulating small dots in innumerable layers and with varying hues. The result is a shimmering surface that seems to vibrate with the interplay between markings.

Senga Nengudi

(Born 1943 in Chicago)

Inside/Outside, 1977

Nylon, mesh, and rubber

Brooklyn Museum. Gift of Burt Aaron, the Council for Feminist Art, and the Alfred T. White Fund, 2011.21

At the forefront of the African American avant-garde in Los Angeles and New York in the 1970s, Senga Nengudi was first recognized for her anthropomorphic nylon mesh sculptures, such as *Inside/Outside*. The artist's background as a dancer and choreographer informs her practice, and she has often made use of her sculptures in her own performances, testing the limits of her constructions by wearing and stretching the nylons to the brink of bursting. During this period, Nengudi was involved with a multitude of spaces and collaborators, including Just Above Midtown Gallery and the dancer Blondell Cummings. *Inside/Outside* was included in her 1977 exhibition at Just Above Midtown, and she was also represented in *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States* at New York's A.I.R. Gallery in 1980.



Senga Nengudi performing with *Inside/Outside*

Senga Nengudi

(Born 1943 in Chicago)

Rapunzel, 1981

Gelatin silver print (documentation of performance)

Courtesy the artist, Lévy Gorvy Gallery, New York, and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

Lorraine O'Grady

(Born 1934 in Boston)

Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Costume, 1980

Costume made from white gloves

The Eileen Harris Norton Collection, Santa Monica, California

Untitled (Mlle Bourgeoise Noire), 1980-83/2009

From left to right, top to bottom:

Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Leaves the Safety of Home (New Museum performance 1981)

Mlle Bourgeoise Noire and Her Master of Ceremonies Enter the New Museum

Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Asks, Won't you help me lighten my heavy bouquet?

A Skeptic Inspects Mlle Bourgeoise Noire's Cape

Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Smiles, She Smiles, She Smiles

Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Continues Her Tournée

Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Removes the Cape and Puts on Her Gloves

Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Begins to Concentrate

Crowd Watches Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Whipping Herself

Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Beats Herself with the Whip-That-Made-Plantations-Move

Crowd Watches Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Shouting Her Poem

Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Shouts Out Her Poem

Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Leaves the New Museum

Mlle Bourgeoise Noire Celebrates with Her Friends

Gelatin silver prints

All courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, New York

Lorraine O'Grady's first public performance, *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire*, remains a pivotal work of race, gender, and class critique. Dressed in an elaborate costume made of 180 pairs of white gloves and carrying a cat-o'-nine-tails whip made from sail rope studded with white chrysanthemums, O'Grady made uninvited appearances at openings at the New Museum of Contemporary Art and Just Above Midtown Gallery in New York as the farcical and indicting persona Miss Black Middle-Class 1955, demanding attention for black women artists.

The films on view in this room were supported by Third World Newsreel, an alternative media arts organization dedicated to the production, distribution, and preservation of independent films by and about people of color. It was founded in 1967 in New York as Newsreel, an activist filmmaking collective, becoming Third World Newsreel in 1973, and remains active today.

Camille Billops

(Born 1933 in Los Angeles)

Finding Christa, 1991

Video (black and white, sound; 55:00 minutes)

Suzanne, Suzanne, 1982

Video (black and white, sound; 30:00 minutes)

Third World Newsreel, New York

In both her life and work, Camille Billops refuses the strictures placed upon her as a black woman by her family or society, creating films that air the “dirty laundry” of her own and her family’s past. In *Finding Christa*, she turns the lens on her choice to put her daughter, Christa, up for adoption as a young child. Presenting her decision as difficult but ultimately better for herself and her daughter, Billops enacts a revolutionary refusal by neither hiding from nor apologizing for her choice. When combined with the film’s unflinching assessment of what, in scholar, feminist theorist, and cultural critic bell hooks’s opinion, is the “lie” of contemporary feminism—namely that women “can have everything”—this radical refusal to judge herself gives *Finding Christa* its subversive power and potential.

In her film *Suzanne, Suzanne*, Billops follows her niece, a recovering heroin addict with two young children. She frames her protagonist’s struggles with addiction in the context of Suzanne’s father’s physical abuse of both her mother and herself, a lack of communication about mental health in her family, and the expectation that, as a woman, “what you did with family was endure.” Asked by bell hooks in an interview in 1996 if she knew that *Suzanne, Suzanne* was a “feminist film” as she was making it, Billops replied, “No. How would you know? Domestic violence was not talked about the way it is now.”

Christine Choy

(Born 1952 in Shanghai)

Susan Robeson

(Born 1953 in New York)

Teach Our Children, 1972

Video (black and white, sound; 35:00 minutes)

Third World Newsreel, New York

In 1971, inmates at the Attica Correctional Facility in Attica, New York, took control of the prison for four days to protest their living conditions and the denial of their basic political rights. Christine Choy and Susan Robeson’s film *Teach Our Children* is a powerful document of the rebellion featuring footage from the prison and interviews with the incarcerated.

Camille Billops

(Born 1933 in Los Angeles)

Still from *Suzanne, Suzanne*, undated

Digital C-print of film still surrogate

***Suzanne, Suzanne*, undated**

Postcard

Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory
University, Atlanta

Finding Christa, undated

Facsimile of printed poster

Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory
University, Atlanta

Blondell Cummings

(Born 1944 in Effingham, South Carolina; died 2015 in new York)

***Chicken Soup*, 1981**

Video (color, sound; 16:03 minutes).

New York Live Arts

Oscillating between the realism of the artist working in a kitchen and the surrealism of a set of convulsively choreographed movements, Blondell Cummings's *Chicken Soup* presents an ambivalent view of gendered domestic work. This postmodern dance performance evokes Cummings's early memories of her grandmother working in the kitchen. It was named an American masterpiece by the National Endowment for the Arts in 2006. The video on view is documentation of Cummings's performance of *Chicken Soup* at the Dance Theater Workshop in New York in 1983.

Alison Saar

(Born 1956 in Los Angeles)

Sapphire, 1985

Wood and mixed media

Collection of Gai Gherardi and Rhonda Saboff

Lorraine O'Grady

(Born 1934 in Boston)

Rivers, First Draft, 1982/2015

Digital C-print from Kodachrome 35mm slides

Courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, New York

Performed in New York's Central Park Loch on August 18, 1982, *Rivers, First Draft* was conceived of as a "collage-in-space" with different actions taking place simultaneously on two sides of a stream and a nearby hill. Lorraine O'Grady describes its structure as a "three-ring circus" in which multiple narratives compete for attention to unite two different heritages, the Caribbean and New England, and three different ages and aspects of O'Grady's self, family dynamics, and artistic identity. The full documentation of the performance consists of forty-eight images, which reflect the dreamlike quality of the original work. A subset of twenty-two images from the *Künstlerroman* ("becoming an artist") section is on view here. O'Grady drew inspiration from Haitian Vodou for this installation, and the arrangement of images evokes the "crossroad," a key concept in African-based religions in the Western Hemisphere.

The work's seventeen performers, including O'Grady, are identified by their vibrantly colored clothing, such as the Woman in Red (symbolizing O'Grady's adult self), the Woman in White (symbolizing O'Grady's mother), and the Teenager in Magenta (symbolizing O'Grady's adolescent self). Serving as tableaux vivants of O'Grady's past are the Girl in White, who recites Latin grammar lessons through a megaphone, the Woman in White, who disinterestedly grates coconuts, and the Nantucket Memorial, a symbol of O'Grady's New England upbringing. The Woman in Red navigates her entrance into the 1970s New York art world through the characters of the Debauchees (representing her life in pop culture as a rock critic), Art Snobs, and Black Male Artists in Yellow. A decisive moment occurs when the Woman in Red spray-paints a white stove red, signifying not only when O'Grady begins her artistic transformation, but also when she becomes her own person outside of her mother's indoctrination and aligns herself with feminist discourse. The ending sequence unites O'Grady's childhood, adolescent, and adult selves as the characters walk down the stream together. For her, this scene represents the moment before she performed her first artwork, the now iconic *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* (on view nearby).

Rivers, First Draft was performed only once for a small invited audience of friends from Linda Goode Bryant's Just Above Midtown gallery and occasional passersby. For O'Grady, "doing *Rivers* in the context of Just Above Midtown was a unique art-making moment, one when the enabling audience—the audience which allows the work to come into existence and to which the work speaks—and the audience that consumes the work were one and the same."

Lorna Simpson

(Born 1960 in Brooklyn)

Waterbearer, 1986

Gelatin silver print with vinyl lettering

Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

Along with Carrie Mae Weems, Lorna Simpson represents the youngest generation of artists in *We Wanted a Revolution*. These artists' practices recast the political concerns of earlier activist generations through the combination of photography and text that emerged in the 1980s. In this work, the waterbearer disrupts her task, pouring water with abandon. The paired text describes how women's stories are often undermined and ignored. Personal and cultural memory are frequent themes of Simpson's work. *Waterbearer* was reproduced in *B Culture* magazine in 1987, where influential feminist author bell hooks first encountered it, referring to the disregard of the female subject's experience as "subjugated knowledge."

Carrie Mae Weems

(Born 1953 in Portland, Oregon)

Family Pictures and Stories, 1978-84

Gelatin silver prints and audio

Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

In 1965, Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote a highly controversial report, titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, that blamed “the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society” on a weak family structure. Carrie Mae Weems’s *Family Pictures and Stories*, featuring her own Portland, Oregon, family, intended to refute the Moynihan Report. Incorporating candid photographs of her family with written text and audio recordings that document her family’s history, Weems creates a deeply felt and realistic account of black family life in the United States.

Julie Dash

(Born 1952 in Long Island City, New York)

Four Women, 1975

Video (color, sound; 4:00 minutes)

Illusions, 1983

Video (black and white, sound; 34:00 minutes)

Third World Newsreel, New York

The Diary of an African Nun, 1977

Video (black and white, sound; 16:00 minutes)

L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema is a project by UCLA Film & Television Archive developed as part of Pacific Standard Time: Art in L.A., 1945-80

Filmmaker Julie Dash is renowned for breaking boundaries of race and gender in Hollywood. Dash is well known for *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), which was the first feature film by an African American woman to be theatrically released in the United States. Her first film, the dance-based short *Four Women* (1975), takes its name from a Nina Simone ballad and focuses a critical lens on common stereotypes of black women. *The Diary of an African Nun*, adapted from a short story by Alice Walker, portrays the inner strife of a Ugandan nun struggling with her commitment to Christ. *Illusions* exposes the illusions of both the film industry and racial categorization, following a black woman who “passes” for white in her job at a 1940s Hollywood studio. Along with Barbara McCullough, whose video work is on view in this exhibition, Dash is a part of the L.A. Rebellion, a group of black filmmakers who attended the University of California, Los Angeles’s School of Theater, Film, and Television starting in the late 1960s.

Ayoka Chenzira

(Born 1953 in Philadelphia)

Hair Piece: A Film for Nappyheaded People, 1985

Video (color, sound; 10:00 minutes)

Women Make Movies

Ayoka Chenzira's animated short questions the unattainable beauty standards imposed on women of color in the United States. As the first black woman animator, one of the first black women to write, produce, and direct a feature film, and one of the first people of color to teach film production in higher education, Chenzira is a groundbreaking presence in film.

Lorna Simpson

(Born 1960 in Brooklyn)

Gestures/Re-enactments, 1985

Gelatin silver prints

Collection of Raymond Learsy

Gestures/Re-enactments was Lorna Simpson's first work combining photography and text. The large-scale yet fragmented images of a young black man wearing white combined with enigmatic and distressing texts offer an incomplete narrative that can be read as vulnerable and powerful.

Carrie Mae Weems

(Born 1953 in Portland, Oregon)

White Patty You Don't Shine, 1987-88

Mirror, Mirror, 1987-88

Gelatin silver prints

Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Coupling her sardonic wit with the direct, uncompromising gaze of her subjects, Carrie Mae Weems eviscerates the racism embedded in jokes made at the expense of people of color. These photographs are part of the *Ain't Jokin'* series, one of Weems's earliest bodies of photo-text works.

Rodeo Caldonia High-Fidelity Performance Theater

Founded in 1980s in Brooklyn, New York

Rodeo Caldonia core group: Donna Berwick, Celina Davis, Raye Dowell, Candace Hamilton, Kellie Jones, Lisa Jones, Suzi Kelly, Alice Norris, Alva Rogers, Lorna Simpson, Pamla Tyson, Amber Sunshower, Villeneuve, Sandye Wilson, and Derin Young.

***Combination Skin*, 1986/1991**

Written and directed by Lisa Jones
Video (color, sound; 74:04 minutes)

***Carmella and King Kong*, 1985**

Written and directed by Lisa Jones
Video (color, silent; 23:49 minutes)

Courtesy the artist

Formed by Lisa Jones and Alva Rogers in the mid-1980s, the Rodeo Caldonia High-Fidelity Performance Theater collective was a loose confederation of black women artists, writers, actors, and musicians. Combining the blues term *caldonia*, meaning “a hard-headed and independent woman,” with *rodeo*, for its athletic and social meanings, the Caldonias wanted to “get out in public and act up; to toss off the expectations laid by our genitals, our melanin count, and our college degrees.”

Unconcerned with propriety or respectability politics—efforts by marginalized groups to ensure that those in these groups conform to mainstream social standards—they sought to “stare down the same questions that artists who share [their] gender and race have faced since Phillis Wheatley: What does it mean to be both black and a woman in America? What is our language, who are our allies, and what would freedom mean?” Though their repertoire was small, Rodeo Caldonia’s significance lies in the joy and pleasure they took in themselves and their rejection of oppressive representations of black women.

Jones has described *Combination Skin* as “a one-act comedy . . . about a futuristic game show called *\$100,000 Tragic Mulatto*,” which “explores the tragic mulatto myth and the American crossover dream.” *Carmella and King Kong*, inspired by Jones’s experiences traveling in the Virgin Islands with her sister, is a “cautionary tale about how women reconcile feminism with heterosexual love,” telling the story of a young artist who “discovers that the man she has fallen in love [with] is [the] monster and cinema darling King Kong.”

Coreen Simpson

(Born 1942 in New York)

From left to right:

Church "Praise Dancer," Harlem, NYC, c. 1970s/2017

Raven Chanticleer with Girlfriend, NYC, c. 1980s/2017

Untitled, c. 1980s/2017

The Wiz Opening, NYC, 1978/2017

Harlem Church Lady, c. 1970s/2017

The Club, c. 1980s/2017

Photographic prints

All courtesy the artist

A photographer and jewelry designer, Coreen Simpson was well known for documenting the fashion worlds of New York and Paris as a photographer for *The Village Voice* and *New York Amsterdam News*. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, she photographed the vibrant cultural and social worlds of New York's communities of color, from Harlem church ladies to theater attendees and nightlife devotees. In 1979, Simpson had a photography exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum's Community Gallery. She was also involved with the Where We At collective's *1 + 1 = 3: Joining Forces*, which invited African American male artists to organize a collaborative exhibition with the all-female collective, in 1986.

Ming Smith

(Born in Detroit)

Far left:

Sun Ra Space II, New York, NY, 1978 / 2000

Collection of Jason Moran

From left to right, top to bottom:

Symmetry on the Ivory Coast, Abidjan, Ivory Coast, c. 1972 / 2017

Untitled (Grace Jones in Ballet Costume), New York, NY, c. 1975 / 2017

Untitled (Self-Portrait with Camera), New York, NY, c. 1975 / 2017

Untitled (Self-Portrait with Camera), New York, NY, c. 1975 / 2017

All courtesy the artist and Steven Kasher Gallery, New York

Gelatin silver prints

In 1972, early in her career as a photographer, Ming Smith was invited to join Kamoinge, an association of black photographers formed in 1963 to produce images of empowerment to counteract negative portrayals of black people during the struggle for civil rights. Smith's contributions to the group include portraits of avant-garde composer-performers Grace Jones and Sun Ra, in which indistinct focus lends an enigmatic mystery and a sense of immediacy. In addition to a long-term interest in self-portraiture, Smith traveled extensively, capturing life in the United States and abroad.