

Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem to Begin National Tour in 2019

NEW YORK, New York November 20, 2018



Barkley L. Hendricks, *Lawdy Mama*, 1969 , Oil and gold leaf on canvas, 53 3/4 × 36 1/4 in. The Studio Museum in Harlem; gift of Stuart Liebman, in memory of Joseph B. Liebman 1983.25 © Estate of Barkley L. Hendricks.

Courtesy of the artist's estate, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and American Federation of Arts.

The American Federation of Arts (AFA) is pleased to announce a major traveling exhibition created in collaboration with The Studio Museum in Harlem: *Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem*. Comprised of over one hundred works by nearly eighty artists across all media dating from the 1920s to the present, *Black Refractions* surveys close to a century of creative achievements by artists of African descent and is the first traveling exhibition in twenty-five years to reveal the breadth and expansive growth of the Studio Museum's permanent collection.

Beginning in 2019, the exhibition will be shown at six venues across the United States, with each unique presentation configured to reflect the concerns of the local institutions and audiences. The presenting institutions are the Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, CA (January 15 – April 14, 2019); Gibbes Museum of Art, Charleston, SC (May 24 – August 18, 2019); Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, MI (September 13 – December 8, 2019); Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA (January 17 – April 12, 2020); Frye Art Museum, Seattle, WA (May 9 – August 2, 2020); and Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, UT (August 28 – December 13, 2020).

This landmark initiative explores the vital contributions of artists of African descent, proposing a plurality of narratives of black artistic production and multiple approaches to understanding these works. Such an ambitious, multifaceted project is uniquely possible through the use of the Studio Museum's collection. Through its pioneering exhibitions, public programs, artist residencies, and bold acquisitions, The Studio Museum in Harlem has served as a nexus for artists of African descent locally, nationally, and internationally since its founding in 1968.



Through its groundbreaking *Artist-in-Residence* program, the Studio Museum has supported many distinguished artists at decisive stages in their careers. The exhibition includes artworks by renowned alumni of the residency program such as Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Chakaia Booker, David Hammons, Kerry James Marshall, Mickalene Thomas, and Kehinde Wiley. *Black Refractions* also presents iconic works by artists Elizabeth Catlett, Beauford Delaney, Barkley Hendricks, Jacob Lawrence, Hughie Lee-Smith, Alma Thomas, Bob Thompson, and James VanDerZee, among others.

Norman Lewis, *Bonfire*, 1962. The Studio Museum in Harlem. Gift of the Estate of Norman Lewis. Courtesy of the Norman W. Lewis Estate and Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, NY

Conceived at the height of the civil rights and Black Power movements as a working space for artists and an educational and social forum in which artists and communities could view and interpret art together in Harlem, the Studio Museum has played a vital cultural and civic role in New York City and the global art world for more than five decades. Now, as the Museum celebrates its 50th anniversary, and as interest continues to rise in the work of artists of African descent and in work inspired and influenced by black culture, this exhibition will allow audiences across the country to engage more deeply with artists already familiar to them and to discover new artists working across genres.

“We are delighted to share the incomparable collection of The Studio Museum in Harlem with audiences across the nation,” said Pauline Willis, Director and CEO of the American Federation of Arts. “*Black Refractions* highlights historically significant pieces alongside works by some of the most critically important artists in the field today. The AFA is honored to travel this exhibition and spark dialogue around the artistic contributions by artists of the African diaspora.”

“Over the past fifty years, The Studio Museum in Harlem has played a catalytic role across the United States and the world in advancing the work of visual artists of African descent,” said Thelma Golden, Director and Chief Curator of the Studio Museum. “Now, we are thrilled to collaborate with AFA in sharing works from our collection during an historic moment in the life of the Museum. Though the doors of our former building may be closed, through *Black Refractions* we are able to carry our mission to new audiences, maintaining ourselves as a point of contact between artists of African descent and people across the country.”

“Through our collaboration with the AFA and these important institutions, we are able to explore the Studio Museum’s collection in new ways, while continuing to generate interest and scholarship around the work of artists of African descent,” said Connie H. Choi, Associate Curator, Permanent Collection at The Studio Museum. “*Black*

Refractions deepens our ability to share works and engage with new audiences in new environments, providing additional contexts in which we can understand the powerful works in our collection.”

Artists in the exhibition include:

Derrick Adams, Terry Adkins, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Charles Alston, Benny Andrews, Romare Bearden, Dawoud Bey, McArthur Binion, Betty Blayton-Taylor, Chakaia Booker, Frank Bowling, Mark Bradford, Jordan Casteel, Elizabeth Catlett, LeRoy Clarke, Willie Cole, Eldzier Cortor, Noah Davis, Beauford Delaney, Thornton Dial, Leonardo Drew, Melvin Edwards, Meschac Gaba, Sam Gilliam, David Hammons, Lyle Ashton Harris, Maren Hassinger, Barkley L. Hendricks, Richard Hunt, Clementine Hunter, Juliana Huxtable, Steffani Jemison, Loïs Mailou Jones, Isaac Julien, Titus Kaphar, Seydou Keïta, Jacob Lawrence, Hughie Lee-Smith, Norman Lewis, Glenn Ligon, Kalup Linzy, Tom Lloyd, Whitfield Lovell, Alvin Loving, Kerry James Marshall, Julie Mehretu, Adia Millett, Wangechi Mutu, Kori Newkirk, Otobong Nkanga, Odili Donald Odita, Chris Ofili, Lorraine O'Grady, Jennifer Packer, Howardena Pindell, Robert Pruitt, Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar, Jacolby Satterwhite, Malick Sidibé, Gary Simmons, Lorna Simpson, Shinique Smith, Henry Taylor, Alma Thomas, Hank Willis Thomas, Mickalene Thomas, Bob Thompson, Bill Traylor, James VanDerZee, Nari Ward, Carrie Mae Weems, Stanley Whitney, Jack Whitten, Kehinde Wiley, William T. Williams, Fred Wilson, Hale Woodruff, and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye.

Black Refractions is accompanied by a new publication of the same title co-published by the American Federation of Arts and Rizzoli Electa. The richly illustrated volume includes essays by Connie H. Choi and Kellie Jones; entries by a range of writers, curators and scholars (among them Lauren Haynes, Ashley James, Oluremi C. Onabanjo, Larry Ossei-Mensah and Hallie Ringle) who contextualize the works and provide detailed commentary; and a conversation among Choi, Thelma Golden, and Jones that draws out themes and challenges in collecting and exhibiting modern and contemporary art by artists of African descent.

CURATOR

Connie H. Choi is Associate Curator, Permanent Collection at The Studio Museum in Harlem, where she has worked on the exhibitions *Regarding the Figure* (2017), *Fictions*, and *Their Own Harlems* (both 2017–18). Prior to joining the museum in 2017, Choi was the Assistant Curator of American Art at the Brooklyn Museum. She is a PhD candidate in art history at Columbia University, and holds a BA in the history of art from Yale University and an EdM in arts education from Harvard University.