

## Collector Peggy Cooper Cafritz Bequeaths More Than 600 Works to the Studio Museum and Duke Ellington School of the Arts

The bequest has been called the largest-ever donation of contemporary artworks by artists of African descent.

**Henri Neuendorf**, October 9, 2018



Nina Chanel Abney *Untitled* (2012). Photo: courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, © Nina Chanel Abney.

In an unprecedented bequest, billed as the largest-ever donation of contemporary artwork by artists of African descent, the late collector and arts philanthropist Peggy Cooper Cafritz has left more than 650 artworks to the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington, DC.

The collector, who died in February at the age of 70, was a major advocate for black artists, though her legacy goes beyond her storied collection. She co-founded the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in 1974, supported its graduates and faculty for decades, and

fostered an entire artistic community by opening her home to host events, gatherings, and dinners with artists and art-world figures.



Hank Willis Thomas *Tip Off* (2014). Photo: Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, © Hank Willis Thomas.

The Studio Museum received more than 400 works, the bulk of Cafritz’s gift. Ahead of a major expansion for the museum, the new additions reinforce and fill gaps in its existing collection, according to the museum, and span multiple generations of artists. Many artists whose works are included in the gift are alumni of the museum’s well-known artist-in-residence program, or have shown there. The trove includes works by Nina Chanel Abney, Derrick Adams, Sanford Biggers, Nick Cave, Noah Davis, and Kerry James Marshall.

Nick Cave *Soundsuit* (2009). Photo: Courtesy the artist and Jack ShainmanGallery, New York, © Nick Cave.

“Peggy was a trailblazing champion of artists of African descent, and at her core believed deeply in the power of art,” Studio Museum director Thelma Golden said. “Through her collecting and her support of artists, she quite literally transformed the way the world viewed black artists.... Now, that astonishing belief in artists will prove transformative to the Studio Museum, as this gift broadens and deepens our collection at a historic moment in the life of our institution.”

Meanwhile the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, which has served as an incubator of artistic talent in the DC area, received roughly 250 artworks, which will form the core of the



research and display collection for students. Many of the gifted artworks were created by artists affiliated with the school, such as faculty members Bill Harris and Jacqueline Maggi, or notable alumni including Hank Willis Thomas or Chinedu Felix Osuchukwu.



Lynette Yiadom-Boakye *No Head for Violence* (2011).  
Photo: Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery,  
New York, © Lynette Yiadom-Boayke.

Tia Powell Harris, chief executive of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, said in a statement: “Peggy still guides every step we take at the Duke Ellington School. By using this bequest to achieve her goal of imbuing our building with art, she will forever inspire not only our students and their families but the members of the public who come to us as a magnet for performances and exhibitions.”