

## An Eye-Opening Exhibition Looks at How Black Artists Have Dissected and Rearranged the History of European Modernism—See It Here

While museums are closed to the public, we are spotlighting an inspiring exhibition somewhere around the globe each day.

**Caroline Goldstein**, March 24, 2020



*Hank Willis Thomas, Icarus (2016). © Hank Willis Thomas, Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.*

*While museums around the globe are closed to the public, we are spotlighting each day an inspiring exhibition that was previously on view. Even if you can't see it in person, allow us to give you a virtual look.*

*“Riffs and Relations: African American Artists and the European Modernist Tradition”*

*Phillips Collection, Washington, DC*

**What the museum says:** The show organized by guest curator Dr. Adrienne Childs, “presents works by African American artists of the 20th and 21st centuries together with examples by the early 20th-century European artists with whom they engaged.

“European modernist art has been an important, yet complicated influence on black artists for more than a century. The powerful push and pull of this relationship constitutes a distinct tradition for many African American artists who have mined the narratives of art history, whether to find inspiration, mount a critique, or claim their own space. ‘Riffs and Relations’ examines these cross-cultural conversations and presents the divergent works that reflect these complex dialogues.”

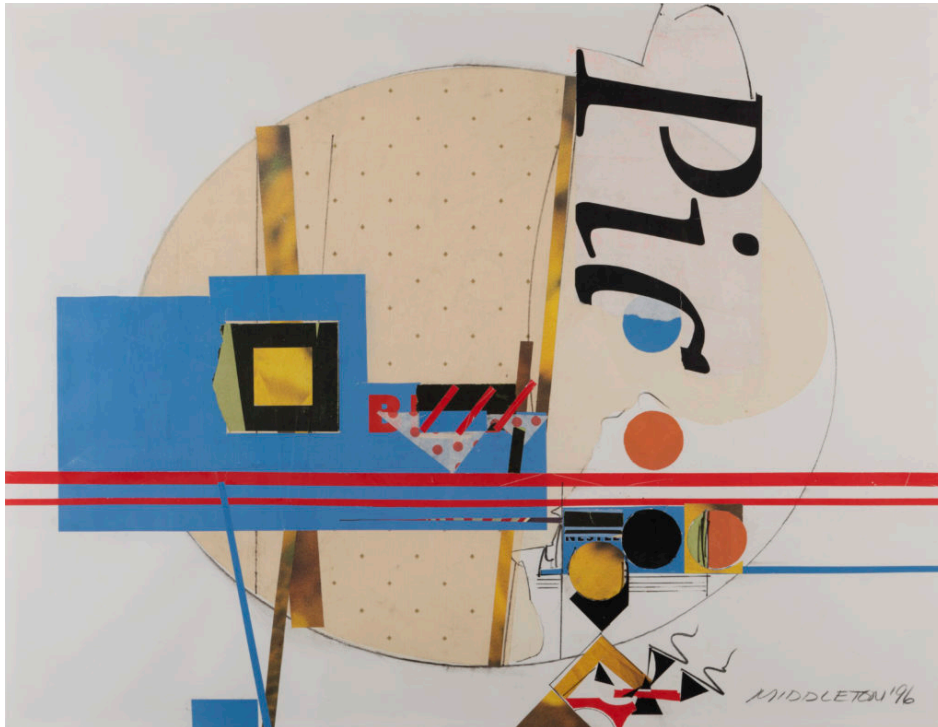
**Why it’s worth a look:** In the jewel-box museum that is the Phillips Collection, which includes so many gems of European modernism, a show that tackles the myth of the genius white male artist is especially powerful. The contemporary African American artists in this show include luminaries and lesser-known practitioners, many of them directly riffing on European examples that came before them to offer an expanded view of what tradition, transformation, and critique can mean in an era when influence is a complicated and thorny subject.

**What it looks like:**



Faith Ringgold, *Picasso's Studio* (1991). © 2020 Faith Ringgold / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, Courtesy ACA Galleries, New York.





Sam Middleton, *Table Top Still Life* (1996). Courtesy of Spanierman Modern, NY/Miami.



Pablo Picasso, *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, after Manet I (1962).



*Carrie Mae Weems, After Manet (2002,2015). Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. © Carrie Mae Weems*



*Titus Kaphar, Pushing Back the Light (2012). Courtesy of the artist and the photographer, Christopher Gardner.*





*Ayana V. Jackson, Judgement of Paris (2018). Courtesy of the artist and Mariana Ibrahim Gallery, Chicago.*



*Winold Reiss, African Phantasy: Awakening (c. 1925). Courtesy of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC.*



*Martin Puryear, Face Down (2008) Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery © Martin Puryear.*



*Sanford Biggers, Negerplastik (2016). photo: Todd-White Art Photography.*





*Elizabeth Catlett, Ife (2002). © 2020 Catlett Mora Family Trust / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.*



*Janet Taylor Pickett, And She was Born (2017). Courtesy of the artist.*



*Mequitta Ahuja, Xpect (2018). Courtesy of the artist.*



*Installation view, "Riffs and Relations" at the Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.*





Riffs and Relations Exhibition.  
Installation view, "Riffs and Relations" at the Phillips Collection, Washington, DC. Washington DC.



Installation view, "Riffs and Relations" at the Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.