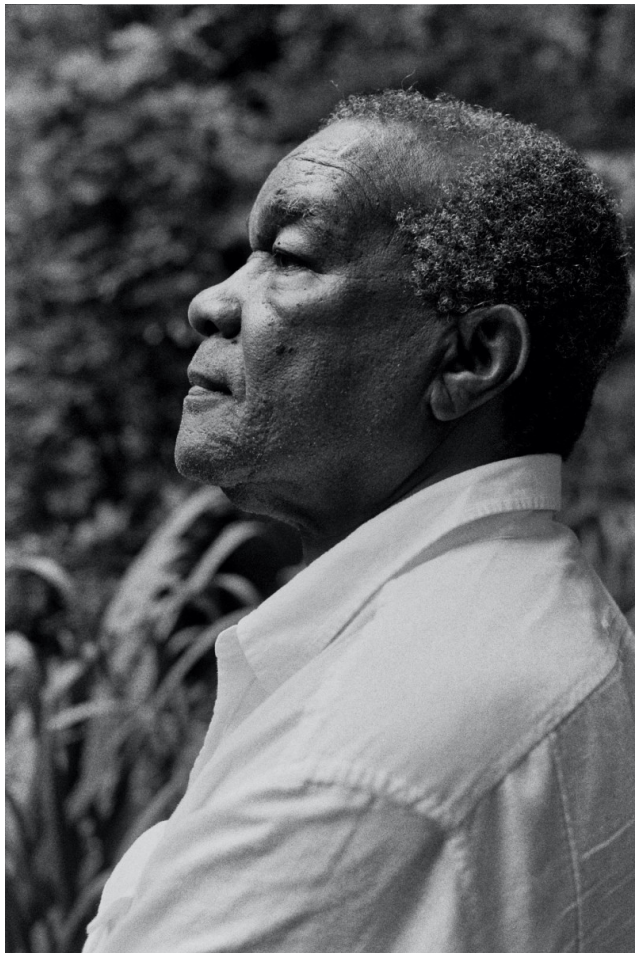


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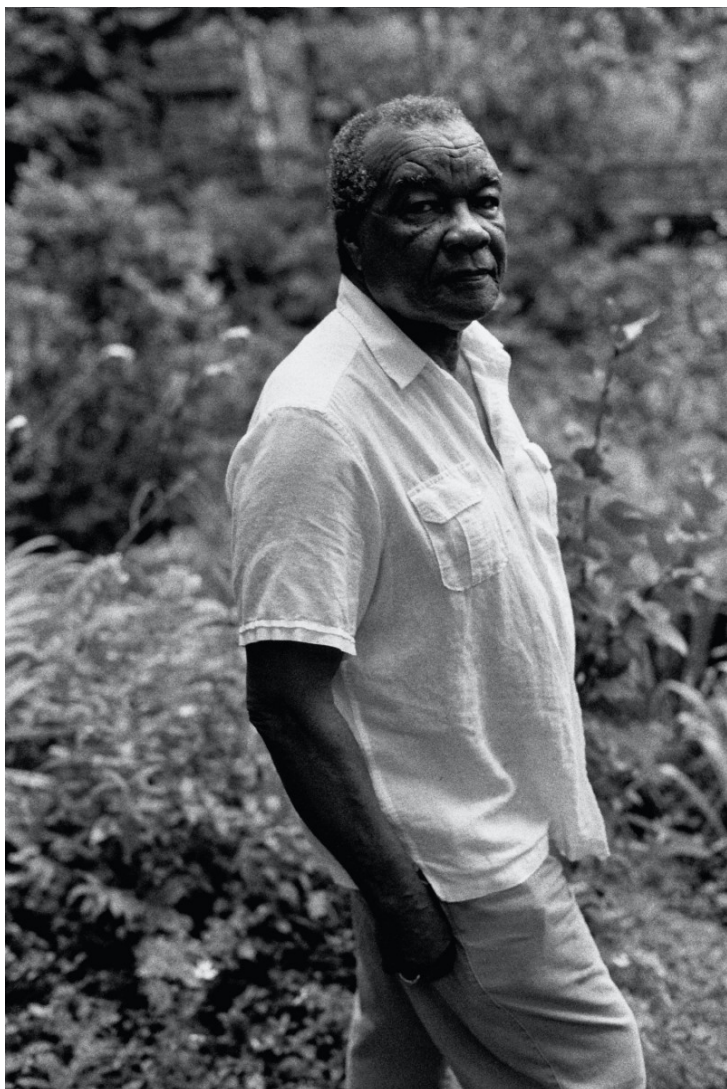
Photos: Lyle Ashton Harris's Never-Before-Seen Portraits of Late Art Historian David C. Driskell

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David C. Driskell, photographed by Lyle Ashton Harris in 2015.

In 2015, Lyle Ashton Harris visited the late curator, scholar, collector, and artist David C. Driskell, who died last week at 88, at his house in Maine and took intimate portraits of him. “He accepted me unconditionally,” Harris said. “He was of a generation of African American men of letters with a broad sense of history and there was something about that unconditional acceptance, or grace, if you will, that made me feel welcomed. He saw me in my fullness. That’s something I cherish and respect.”



David C. Driskell, photographed by Lyle Ashton Harris in 2015.

Harris can't remember exactly when he met Driskell. It was sometime in the early or mid-1990s. Harris had encountered Driskell's work some years earlier when he was an undergraduate student at Wesleyan University in Connecticut through the catalogue of the curator's seminal exhibition "Two Centuries of Black American Art," which debuted at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1976, timed to the country's bicentennial celebrations.

"It wasn't until many later years, which is often the case, that I revisited the *Two Centuries of Black American Art* catalogue and saw how influential it was," Harris said. "When I picked up the book again, 20 years later, reading through the early chapters that talk about the material artifacts of Black culture and even during antebellum. The book offers and furnishes evidence of material artistry of Black life in the capital, for example, in terms of the building of the White House.



David C. Driskell, photographed by Lyle Ashton Harris in 2015.
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“I revisited the book when I was working on my recent ‘Flash of the Spirit’ series, thinking about Yoruba culture, various iconography and imagery that was embedded in, and indebted to, national American architecture or iron work,” Harris said. “For me, that was very poignant and rich.”



David C. Driskell in his studio, photographed by Lyle Ashton Harris in 2015.

Harris knows he had met him by the time of the opening of the “Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art,” a watershed exhibition curated by Thelma Golden at the Whitney Museum in New York in 1994. “Black Male” was the first major institutional show to include Harris’s work, and Driskell had contributed a catalogue essay.

“He accepted me unconditionally,” Harris said of Driskell. “He was of a generation of African American men of letters who broad sense of history and there was something about that unconditional acceptance, or grace, if you will, that made me feel welcomed.”



David C. Driskell and his nephew Rodney Moore working at the kitchen table in Driskell’s Maine home, photographed by Lyle Ashton Harris in 2015.

Harris and Driskell lost touch over the years, but reconnected in 2014, when the photographer received the 10th annual David C. Driskell Prize, which recognizes artists, scholars, and more for their contributions to African American art and is administered by the High Museum in Atlanta.

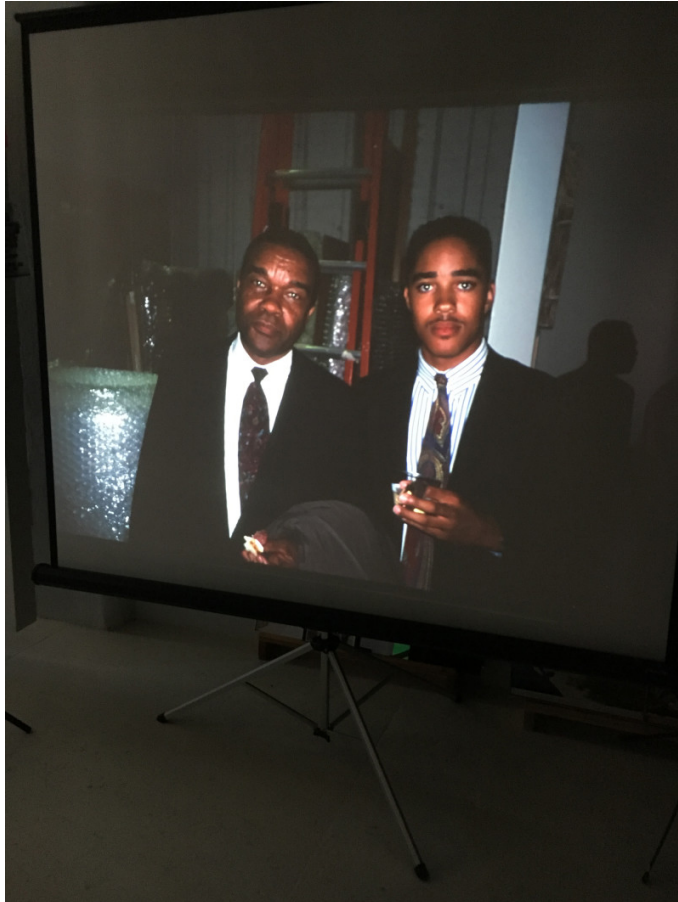
“It was an honor to have received that award and to be anointed, if you will, by him,” Harris said of Driskell Prize. “Based on certain experiences when I was younger or being perceived as an outsider or someone who was very transgressive, the fact that in his pantheon of creativity or scholarship that he saw me firmly in that tradition of that, as opposed of being an outlier.”



David C. Driskell (seated right), at his home in Maine with his nephew, Rodney Moore (far left), wife Thelma (center), and family friends Bonnie and Larry Frazier (standing), photographed by Lyle Ashton Harris in 2015.



Thelma G. DeLoatch and Rodney Moore, photographed by Lyle Ashton Harris in 2015.



©Lyle Ashton Harris. Courtesy the artist.

When Harris was going through his Ektachrome Archive—a project featuring thousands of images he had shot throughout the 1990s that act as a who’s who of Black intellectual and artistic life in the United States and elsewhere—he stumbled upon an image of Driskell with his nephew Rodney Moore. He sent the image to Moore in 2015 as he was preparing to include it in an installation in the 2016 Bienal de São Paulo, an version of which would later appear in the 2017 Whitney Biennial. Moore also couldn’t place the image.

“Often memory plays tricks on us, but the photographs in a way offer evidence, and the portrait of David and his young nephew at the time is clearly from the ’90s,” Harris said.