

In Our Time: Eleven Artists + W.E.B. Du Bois

Curated by
Loretta
Yarlow

9.26–
12.20.2025

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Cover:
LaToya Ruby Frazier
United States Steel Clairton Coke Works, C.I.T.E. and Monongahela River [detail], 2013
Archival pigment print
42 ¼ x 63 ½ inches, edition 1 of 5 + 2 APs
© LaToya Ruby Frazier
Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery

*“A sewer.... A drain.....A place for throwing waste.
Like W.E.B. Du Bois, I too was born by a golden
river, in the shadow of two great hills.”*

— LaToya Ruby Frazier

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“Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow, not some more convenient season. It is today that our best work can be done.”
– W.E.B. Du Bois

More than 60 years after the death of W.E.B. Du Bois, *In Our Time: Eleven Artists + W.E.B. Du Bois* turns to a selection of leading artists to reflect on the legacy of one of the most profound and influential African American intellectuals of the 20th century and on the impact that Du Bois has had on their work. Artworks by **Angel Abreu/Studio K.O.S.; Derrick Adams; Radcliffe Bailey; LaToya Ruby Frazier; Theaster Gates; Jenny Holzer; Julie Mehretu; Ann Messner; Jefferson Pinder; Mickalene Thomas; and Carrie Mae Weems** offer aesthetic contributions through today’s lens to the re-examination of Du Bois’s role as a public intellectual, civil rights activist, cultural critic, sociologist, historian, environmentalist, poet, novelist, and playwright.

These artists’ research-based, socially-engaged methods attest to a meaningful approach to artistic creation. Works range from photography, painting, sculpture, and works on paper to video and installations—all motivated by Du Bois’s poetic writing, his early anticipation of women’s suffrage, environmental movements, his warnings against nuclear proliferation, and other modern afflictions. Others have found inspiration in the groundwork he laid for movements in public dissent; others show how the problems Du Bois wrote about a century ago are still with us, and in certain cases more urgent than ever. The results of their meaningful work are both personal and universal.

This exhibition is a special iteration of an exhibition I curated in 2013, *Du Bois in Our Time* at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, with many of the same artists asked again to reflect on Du Bois’s

life-long commitment to racial and social justice. New to the roster are Derrick Adams, Angel Abreu/Studio K.O.S., Theaster Gates, and Jenny Holzer. In addition, a seminal artwork by the recently deceased artist Radcliffe Bailey will bring the number of artists to eleven for the exhibition’s new phase. Several artists commissioned to participate in the 2013 exhibition were at the start of their careers—such as LaToya Ruby Frazier, Mickalene Thomas, and Angel Abreu (at the time a member of Tim Rollins & K.O.S.). Seeing their work today in 2025 gives our audience a new context in which to consider their important contribution to the Du Bois legacy.

Also in 2013, the W.E.B. Du Bois Library at the University of Massachusetts Amherst announced it had digitized an estimated 100,000 items from its Du Bois collection, offering online access for the first time to his original diaries, letters, photographs, and other material related to the most important and accomplished African American scholar in the history of the U.S.

2013 and Today: What remains the same? What has changed?

2013 was the year that marked 150 years since the Emancipation Proclamation; the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington (a high-water mark of the civil rights movement); and the 50th anniversary of the passing of W.E.B. Du Bois, who was in exile in Ghana at the time of his death. The exhibition was organized at a time of optimism when some thought a post-racial society was possible during the Obama administration. Much has changed these past ten years, both in the art world and with today’s realities. Many themes explored by artists in the 2013 exhibition, taken directly from Du Bois’s own writing, still resonate with us today. This exhibition



Portrait of W.E.B. Du Bois; Photo by Cornelius M. Battey, 1918.

highlights how Du Bois continues to be a mentor and beacon to generations of intellectual and creative communities. Double consciousness was a concept first introduced by Du Bois in his 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk*, in which he explores concepts of being, belonging, and Blackness as a psychological state. Du Bois described double consciousness as the struggle African Americans face to remain true to Black culture while at the same time conforming to dominant white society. Artists whose work pursues this theme in the exhibition are Angel Abreu/Studio KOS, Derrick Adams, and Radcliffe Bailey.

Angel Abreu’s archival giclée prints titled “IM” refer to Ralph Ellison’s novel *Invisible Man*, which addresses many of the social and intellectual issues faced by African Americans in the early 20th century as well as issues of individuality and personal identity. It also draws upon the “I AM A MAN” placard that was held by Memphis

sanitation workers after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a powerful protest for peace and change. Abreu’s work highlights how racism is not just a chapter in our history books, but rather a repetitive cycle and ever-present threat. Much of **Derrick Adams’s** work is centered around Black identity, frequently referencing patterns, images, and themes of Black culture in America. He muses: “what can I reveal that has not been shown? Black people—not entertaining, just being, living. Letting people deal with that as reality.” His artwork *Fixing My Face* (2021) is from the series *Motion Picture Paintings* that pays homage to the Black figure and draws inspiration from the artist’s personal observations and imagination. Adams asks the viewer to see what he sees: Blackness in its varied forms of storytelling and achievement, rather than in the stereotypes that have traditionally saturated the media.

Radcliffe Bailey's sculpture *Untitled* (2022) explores issues of Black identity and attempts to answer questions of his own multi-layered personal experience. Bailey explains that “Du Bois’s assertion that one should be able to be African and American is simply good sense. Art is likewise particular and universal simultaneously. I too am ‘a co-worker in the kingdom of culture,’ striving to create art that genuinely articulates my message to African Americans and the art world.”

Referencing a 1930 speech by Du Bois that addressed his relation to the contaminated Housatonic River in Massachusetts where he grew up, **LaToya Ruby Frazier's** photographs connect to the river near her childhood home, where there is similar environmental degradation to that of the Housatonic River. Her photographs are timely reminders of the increasing development of industrialization and its negative impact on nature and human existence.

Frazier has said: “In 1982, similar to Du Bois, I was born next to another river, the Monongahela, in Braddock, Pennsylvania. Growing up there has made me realize that, if seventy percent of the world is covered with water and more than fifty percent of our bodies are comprised of water, then the properties found in waters that surround our artificial environments reflect not only a physical condition, but a spiritual condition in which we exist.”

Inspired by Du Bois’s sociological studies on the advancements of Black Americans from the time of Emancipation to 1900, **Theaster Gates's** neon sculpture *Black Empire* is a geometric abstraction based on Du Bois’s data visualizations exhibited at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris. Du Bois’s sophisticated modernist charting style broke down conventions of statistical representations, with numbers represented through colors and bar graphs of different shapes. Gates gives poetic form to Du Bois’s archival data by removing words and numbers and opting instead for a more pared-down exploration of the historical data. Through this synthesis and reconfiguration of the original graphs, Gates situates his work as an homage to Du Bois’s project, illuminating how

Du Bois’s analysis and focus on systems and institutions still occupy contemporary consciousness.

In fall 2020, during the presidential election, the University of Chicago commissioned artist and alumna **Jenny Holzer** to debut a new public art project, *YOU BE MY ALLY*, a web-based augmented reality app. Holzer, an activist artist whose medium is writing, provokes public debate on social and political justice. These app projections offered users the opportunity to superimpose timely phrases, such as “*There breathes a hope — a faith in the ultimate justice of things*” from Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* (excerpts from distinguished writers included W.E.B. Du Bois, Helen Keller, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Friedrich Nietzsche, Plato, Mary Shelley, and Virginia Woolf). When app users arrived at a specially marked location and held up their smartphones to view the app, they had the option to take a photo and share the project on social media. From the Holzer Studio and the University of Chicago archives, the photographs in this exhibition show the words of Du Bois superimposed on the Saarinen Law School building and on a passing truck, locations for Du Bois’s meaningful words.

Du Bois’s themes of migration were first explained in his hand-drawn charts and maps prepared for the Negro Exhibit of the American Section at the 1900 Paris Exposition, which showed economic and social progress of African Americans since emancipation. **Julie Mehretu's** abstract and geometric mark-making contend with today’s monumental themes of migration, exodus, war, and globalization. The calligraphic complexity of her prints in this exhibition resembles turbulent atmospheres and fragmentary networks that allude to current crises and events. In addition to layers of tones, textures, and lines, there are multiple small marks, which have particular significance for Mehretu, who stated in a 2011 video about her art, “each mark represents individual agency, an active character” and that, when joined together, “lots of small marks have power.”



Du Bois Peony of Hope; © Carrie Mae Weems. Courtesy of the artist.

Ann Messner’s contribution to the 2013 exhibition *Du Bois: The FBI Files* is reinstalled in Pratt’s exhibition with its theme of surveillance, as damaging today as it was then, with serious risks for freedom of expression and privacy. Ann Messner writes about her contribution to the exhibition: “Researching the life of Du Bois I was struck by how shameless was the US government’s ongoing surveillance into both the private and public life of the man and his close associates; surveillance fueled by both anti-communist hysteria and xenophobic fear. All the more remarkable remains Du Bois’ unwavering commitment to his life’s work despite unsettling intimidation.” In 1961, at the age of 93, Du Bois moved to Ghana where he became a citizen and passed away in 1963.

In his 1903 book *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois warned: “The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line.” **Jefferson Pinder’s** video *float* shows how this remains a 21st-century problem as a literal social barrier. A group of mixed-race performers in the video struggle to hold together as they are adrift to reenact an event in which racial differences tore apart the fiber of Chicago. Eugene Williams, age 17, was stoned to death by white teenagers while floating over to the “white side” of a Chicago beach on July 27th, 1919. On the exact time and date 100 years later, the artist sent a group of performers adrift. Connected by rope in the mighty Lake Michigan, the large ensemble becomes a monument to the moment of racial disparity. Now, in the present, a mixed-race group struggles to hold together, as the same forces that led to Eugene’s float are still present today.

Du Bois deeply cared about women’s rights, suffrage, and equality, as he wrote in an issue of *The Crisis* (1911) and in his novel *The Quest* (1911). Today, new contributions are being charted by women, and especially women of color. **Mickalene Thomas’s** video *Happy Birthday to a Beautiful Woman* reflects on the role of women’s appearance in contemporary society, encompassing themes of identity, empowerment, and social norms. Thomas celebrates her mother and longtime muse, former fashion model Sandra Bush. The film reveals another side

of this woman who maintains poise and confidence through stories, film clips, and snapshots of her personal and physical struggles. As Thomas explains, “one of the reasons I used my mother is because of her charisma, her beauty...and I thought about how I wasn’t ‘using her’ because she was sick, and how a different type of beauty, a different type of aging, a different type of portraiture could come across on film.” This video installation includes a seating area designed by the artist to evoke an intimate living room with period furnishings.

Carrie Mae Weems’s theme of hope was evident in 2013 when she named a flower the “Du Bois Peony of Hope” in Du Bois’s honor and acknowledgment of the optimistic mood at that time. Working closely with Hollingsworth Farms and the American Peony Society in 2013, Weems named a new variety of peony in honor of W.E.B. Du Bois. The “Du Bois Peony of Hope” is available to the public for purchase, thereby allowing thousands of garden enthusiasts to engage in a lasting and sustaining memory of Du Bois.

Weems’s two prints from her *Blue Notes* series in this exhibition feature grainy blue portraits of now-forgotten Black artists and back-up performers whose faces are covered by blocks of solid color. The formal vandalism is at once a reflection and critique of America’s historical erasure of Black artists. Du Bois addressed the historical erasure of Black artists in *The Crisis* magazine (1910–1922, the official magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, NAACP) to promote and elevate Black literary voices. He highlighted the need for recognition of their contributions to art and literature while also criticizing the tendency to only showcase “respectable” Black figures that might be more palatable to white audiences, arguing for a more comprehensive representation of Black experiences in art and history. Today Black Lives Matter and DEI initiatives offer a new awakening to address this historical erasure, returning to Du Bois’s prescient call for Black art to be judged on its own merit.

— *Loretta Yarlow*

Curator Bio

Loretta Yarlow has spent more than four decades as a museum director, curator, educator, and advocate for emerging voices in the arts. She has held leadership roles at institutions in the U.S., Canada, and Europe, including Curator at the Boston ICA; Director/Curator at the York University Art Gallery, Toronto, Canada; Commissioner/Curator of the Canadian Pavilion, 47th Venice Biennale; Guest Curator at the Kunsthalle Vienna; Director of Exhibitions at Pratt Institute; and most recently as Director/Chief Curator of the University Museum of Contemporary Art (UMCA) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

She served as co-director of Yarlow-Salzman Gallery, a leading commercial art gallery in Toronto, and consulted on corporate collections for Petro Canada. This multifaceted career has placed her in a unique position within the global art community, bridging the worlds of public institutions, private collections, and academic museums.

During her career, her work earned museum awards in support of exhibitions and educational programming. Notable exhibitions organized and curated by Yarlow include:

Boston ICA: *Seven Sculptors, New Involvement with Material*: Yael Bentovim, Jackie Ferrara, Jud Fine, Mary Miss, Ree Morton, Hannah Wilke, and Barbara Zucker (1974)

Art Gallery of York University, Toronto: *Marlene Dumas: Miss Interpreted* (1994); *Rodney Graham: School of Velocity and Parsifal* (1995); *Richard Tuttle: New and Early Works* (1997); *Tacita Dean* (2000)

Pratt Manhattan Gallery: *Vito Acconci: Slipping into the 21st Century* (2003); *Terry Winters: Works on Paper* (2004)

UMass Amherst: *The Miraculous in the Everyday*: Tom Friedman, Felix Gonzales-Torres, Gabriel Orozco (2005); *Kimsooja: Performance/Video* (2011); *The Annunciation: Eija-Liisa Ahtila* (2012); *Du Bois in Our Time* (2013); *Walid Raad: Postface* (2014); *Leonardo Drew: Cycles* (2019); *Roni Horn: Pi* (2020); and *Nicole Eisenman: Prince* (2022).

Loretta Yarlow received a B.A. from Sarah Lawrence College and an Ed.M. from Harvard University.

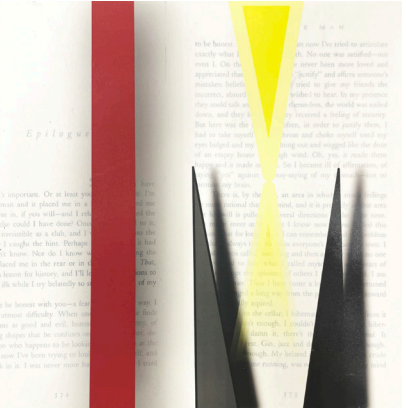
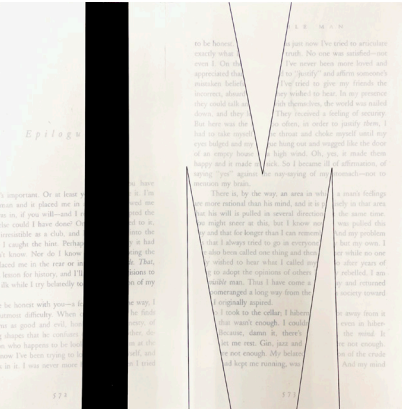
Angel Abreu/Studio K.O.S.

Born in the Bronx, NY, in 1974, Angel Abreu is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice blends painting, literature, and education to reimagine how visual art can be a catalyst for personal and social transformation. Abreu is best known for his long-standing collaboration with the historic art collective Tim Rollins and K.O.S. (Kids of Survival). His creative process thrives in collaborative settings, particularly with youth, where the intersection of visual art, storytelling, and pedagogy serves as fertile ground for deep exploration.

As a member of K.O.S., Abreu's art resides in over 120 public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. His collaborative projects have also been showcased in renowned spaces such as the Walker Art Center, the Tate Modern, and the Bronx Museum of the Arts. Through his exhibitions, workshops, and community-centered projects, Abreu continues to build a legacy that intertwines art, education, and social change.

“W.E.B. Du Bois’s words, ‘I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not...’ encapsulate the spirit of cultural defiance that informs both my personal work and my sense of citizenship. This quote has given me the permission to claim literature, canonical or otherwise, as a shared human inheritance. These works do not discriminate based on race, socio-economic background, or sexual identity. Shakespeare wrote for me as much as he wrote for anyone else. My practice, deeply influenced by this belief and rooted in Emerson’s idea that books are not just to be read but used, engages in dialogue with writers to transform their texts into visual excavations. I create works that go beyond mere illustration to uncover and illuminate new dimensions of meaning and in the process continuing Du Bois’s legacy of asserting cultural and intellectual belonging.” – Abreu

Angel Abreu / Studio K.O.S.
Invisible Man (after Ralph Ellison), 2023
8 collage on wood panels
12 x 12 inches each
Courtesy of the artist



Derrick Adams

Born in Baltimore in 1970, Derrick Adams is a multidisciplinary artist living and working in Brooklyn, New York. Adams’s work celebrates and expands the dialogue around contemporary Black life and culture through scenes of normalcy and perseverance. He received his BFA from Pratt Institute, New York, in 1996 and graduated with an MFA from Columbia University, New York, in 2003. Adams has held numerous teaching positions and is currently a tenured assistant professor in the School of Visual, Media and Performing Arts at CUNY Brooklyn College. He also holds an honorary doctorate from Maryland Institute College of Art.

Adams has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions such as The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland (2022); The Momentary, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas (2021); Hudson River Museum, Yonkers (2020); and the Museum of Arts and Design, New York (2018). The artist has mounted public installations commissioned through Monument Lab on the National Mall, Washington D.C. (2023), Art on the Mart at the Merchandise Mart, Chicago (2023), Art at Amtrak at NYC Penn Station, New York (2023); MTA Arts & Design at the Nostrand Avenue LIRR Station, Brooklyn (2020–ongoing); and RxART at NYC Health + Hospitals/Harlem (2019–ongoing). His art resides in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and the Birmingham Museum of Art, among many others.

Derrick Adams
Fixing My Face, 2021
Acrylic paint and fabric collage on paper on wood panel
48 x 48 x 2 inches
Courtesy of the artist

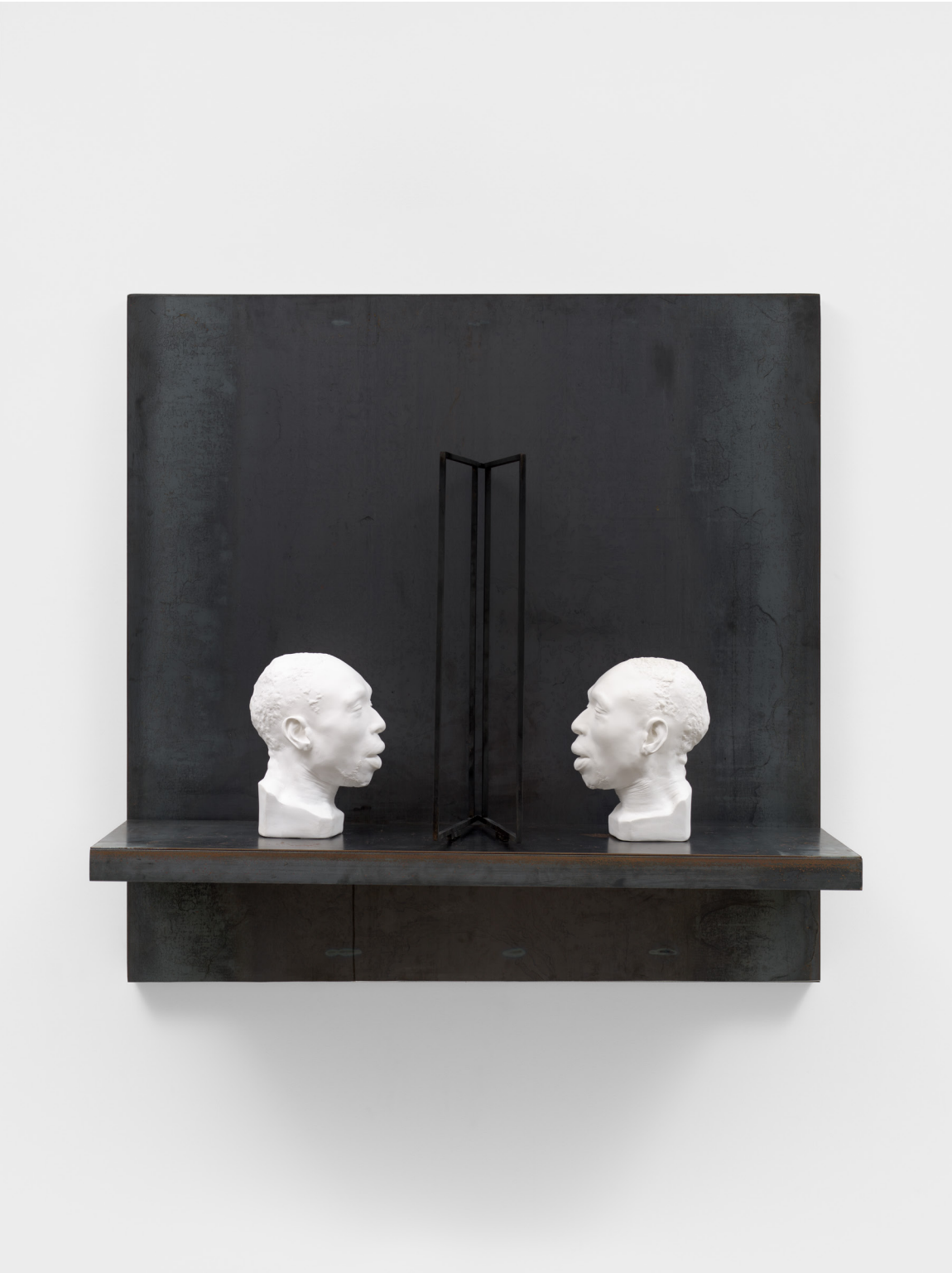


Radcliffe Bailey

Radcliffe Bailey (1968–2023) was known for his mixed-media practice that delved into his Black heritage and childhood in the South. He used layered imagery, culturally significant materials, and text to delve into themes such as ancestry, race, migration, and collective memory. His art often featured found objects and materials from his past that included traditional African sculptures, family tintypes, ships, train tracks, and Georgia red clay. Music was a recurring influence in his creations. His works are in museum collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; the Art Institute of Chicago; the High Museum of Art, Atlanta; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; The Studio Museum, Harlem; and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

“My early thinking on W.E.B. Du Bois was one of respect and admiration for an African American freedom fighter whose excellence placed him in an international pantheon of human rights activists. Du Bois’s prediction of struggle along the color line during the twentieth century seemed like a foregone conclusion, so accurately had it played out. The Du Bois that I personally make use of came gradually into view as I began to grasp the incredible creativity of his fertile mind — striking perspectives on history, sociology, culture, and art that others with the same information had not produced. Du Bois’s assertion that one should be able to be African and American is simply good sense. Art is likewise particular and universal simultaneously. I too am “a co-worker in the kingdom of culture,” striving to create art that genuinely articulates my message to African Americans and the art world.” – Bailey

Radcliffe Bailey
Untitled, 2022
Steel shelf and two plaster busts
48 ¼ x 48 ¼ x 18 inches
© The Estate of Radcliffe Bailey
Courtesy of The Estate of Radcliffe Bailey and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York



LaToya Ruby Frazier

LaToya Ruby Frazier was born in 1982 in Braddock, Pennsylvania. Her artistic practice includes photography, video, performance, installation art, and books, centering on the nexus of social justice and cultural change. Frazier uses collaborative storytelling with the people who appear in her artwork to address topics of industrialism, Rust Belt revitalization, environmental justice, access to healthcare, access to clean water, workers’ rights, human rights, family, and communal history. Frazier has had solo exhibitions at institutions in the U.S. and Europe, including the Brooklyn Museum of Art; Seattle Art Museum; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Contemporary Art Museum, Houston; CAPC Musée d’Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, France; Carré d’Art - musée d’art contemporain de Nîmes, France; among others.

Her work is in public collections including the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Brooklyn Museum, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Carnegie Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Baltimore Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, J. Paul Getty Museum, Seattle Art Museum, and the Centre Georges Pompidou, among many others. Frazier’s selected awards include an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Edinboro University (2019); an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from Pratt Institute (2017); and fellowships from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation’s MacArthur Fellows Program (2015) and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation (2014).

“On July 21, 1930, W.E.B. Du Bois gave a speech that addressed man’s relation to the Housatonic River and its condition. Du Bois described the Housatonic River as the center of the picture. Yet the valley of Great Barrington turned away and used the Housatonic as “a sewer, a drain, a place for throwing waste.” In 1982, similar to Du Bois, I was born next to another river, the Monongahela, in Braddock, Pennsylvania... One night the river flooded. Crossing through miles of man-made manufactures, contaminated soils, and debris, it filled the basement and soaked the floors of my childhood home on Washington Avenue, in the area historically known as The Bottom. Growing up there has made me realize that... the properties found in waters that surround our artificial environments reflect not only a physical condition, but a spiritual condition in which we exist. Through a series of aerial photographs of the Mon-Valley Braddock region, A Despoliation of Water: From the Housatonic to Monongahela River (1930 – 2013) reveal that Du Bois’s words resonate with the current environmental crisis along the Monongahela River in Braddock, Pennsylvania.” – Frazier



LaToya Ruby Frazier
Edgar Thomson Plant and The Bottom, 2013
Archival pigment print
42 ¼ x 63 ½ inches
Edition 3 of 5 + 2 APs, 2 EP
© LaToya Ruby Frazier
Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery

Theaster Gates

Theaster Gates is an artist whose practice finds roots in conceptual formalism, sculpture, space theory, land art, and performance. Trained in urban planning and within the tradition of Japanese ceramics, Gates's artistic philosophy is guided by the custodianship and critical redeployment of culturally significant materials, objects, archives, and spaces.

Gates has exhibited and performed at the Albuquerque Foundation, Sintra, Portugal (2024); The LUMA Foundation, Arles, France (2023, 2024); The New Museum, New York, (2022); The Aichi Triennial, Tokoname (2022); The Serpentine Pavilion, London (2022); The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK (2021); Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (2013 and 2021); Tate Liverpool, UK (2020); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2020); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2019); Palais de Tokyo Paris, France (2019); Sprengel Museum Hannover, Germany (2018); Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland (2018); National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., USA (2017); Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada (2016); Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy (2016); Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria (2016); Punta della Dogana, Venice, Italy (2013); and dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, Germany (2012).

"I've been reflecting on the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, and I've been particularly drawn to the data visualization drawings that he created with a group of students at Georgia State University for the Paris Exposition of 1900. These statistics essentially document Black progress from about 1850 – 1900, notably covering Negro progress in the moments immediately before emancipation, during emancipation and in the aftermath of emancipation. This categorization, this log-

ging, this demonstration of Black progress feels no different from the work that John H. Johnson documented and editorialized through Johnson Publishing Company and magazines such as Ebony and Jet in Chicago. Through the development of an American publishing company that centered affirming stories of Blackness, looking at the success of Black professionals, writers, students, and journalists, Johnson's particular display of Black progress helped us know for ourselves, and ensured the larger world would understand, that Black people were doing things that mattered.

Neon felt like the right material for giving form to these connections. Any contemporary artist, especially thinking about the subject of Blackness, must come through Glenn Ligon, and pay homage to artists like Bruce Naumann and Mary Weatherford, whose contemporary employment of the material resonates.

Neon, for me, represents a frontal method of imposing notions of progress, examining history, and continuing the necessary psychological work of uplift. Through these neon works, I wanted to create an elegant abstraction of the work that Du Bois was invested in, drawing a viewer in to the possibility of aestheticized information and making knowledge capture more interesting. Over the last 10 years, I've been translating these graphics, and in that time, those graphics have gained a fair amount of momentum. It is my hope that people will allow history to be present in a more diligent way; for it is too easy for moments of progress to create contempt for history and varying forms of social preservation." — Gates



Theaster Gates
Black Empire, 2022
Neon, glass, steel
37 ½ x 44 ¾ x 7 inches
Courtesy of Theaster Gates Studio
Photo: Chris Strong

Jenny Holzer

For more than 40 years, Jenny Holzer has presented her astringent ideas, arguments, and sorrows in public places and international exhibitions, including the Venice Biennale, the Guggenheim Museums in New York and Bilbao, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Louvre Abu Dhabi. Her medium, whether formulated as a T-shirt, a plaque, or an LED sign, is writing, and the public dimension is integral to the delivery of her work. Holzer received the Leone d’Oro at the Venice Biennale in 1990, the World Economic Forum’s Crystal Award in 1996, the U.S. State Department’s International Medal of Arts in 2017, and the University of Chicago’s Rosenberger Medal in 2019. She studied at the University of Chicago and holds honorary degrees from Williams College, the Rhode Island School of Design, The New School, and Smith College. She lives and works in New York.



Jenny Holzer
YOU BE MY ALLY, 2020
Augmented reality app
Text: *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. Du Bois, 1903
Installation: University of Chicago, Illinois, USA, 2020
© 2020 Jenny Holzer, member Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY
Photo: Christopher Dilts

YOU BE MY ALLY was commissioned by The University of Chicago, developed under the leadership of Christine Mehring and Jill Sterrett, and realized in partnership with Leigh Fagin, Alexandra Drexelius, student interns, Jenny Holzer Studio, Mark Hellar Studios, LLC., and Holition.

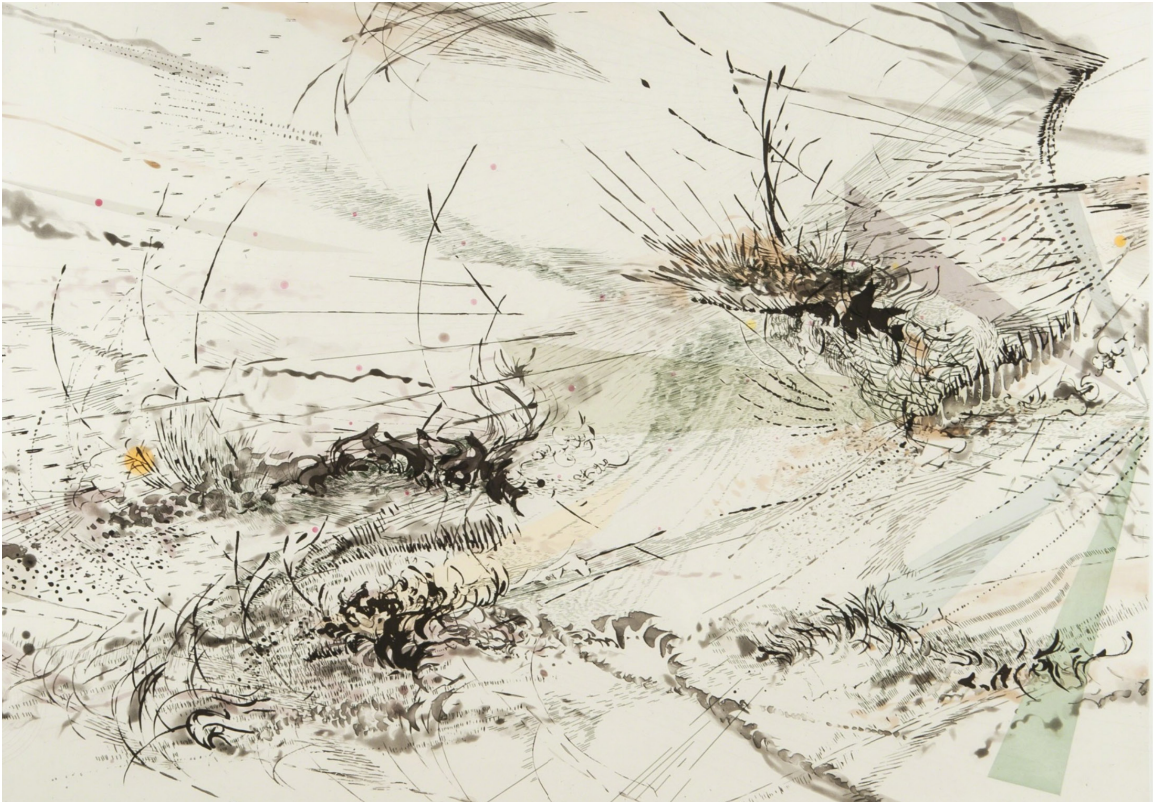
Julie Mehretu

Julie Mehretu was born in 1970 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and now lives and works in New York. She received a B.A. from Kalamazoo College, Michigan, studied at the University Cheik Anta Diop, Dakar Senegal, and received a M.F.A. with honors from The Rhode Island School of Design in 1997. Mehretu’s work is informed by a multitude of sources including politics, literature, and music. Most recently her paintings have incorporated photographic images from broadcast media which depict conflict, injustice, and social unrest. Mehretu’s practice in painting, drawing, and printmaking equally assert the role of art to provoke thought and reflection and express the contemporary condition of the individual and society.

Her work has been exhibited extensively in museums and biennials including the Carnegie International (2004–05), Sydney Biennial (2006), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2010), Documenta 13 (2012), Sharjah Biennial (2015), Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves, Porto, Portugal (2017), Kettle’s Yard, University of Cambridge, UK (2019), and the 58th Venice Biennale (2019). Recent solo exhibitions include a survey at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2019) that traveled to the High Museum, Atlanta; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2021); the Walker Museum of Art, Minneapolis (2021); *Julie Mehretu: Ensemble*, Palazzo Grassi-Pinault Collection, Venice (2024); and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (2024). Among her awards are the MacArthur Fellowship in 2005; the U.S. Department of State Medal of Arts Award in 2015; and membership to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021.

Julie Mehretu
Diffraction, 2005
Color sugar lift aquatint with aquatint, spit bite aquatint and hard ground etching on Gampi paper chine collé
27 ¼ x 39 ¼ inches [image size], 35 ½ x 46 ¾ inches [paper size]
Edition of 35, 5 artist proofs, (AP 2/5)
Courtesy of the artist

“There’s this groundwork and foundation that was laid out by Du Bois with an understanding of self, perspective, and possibility. In trying to negotiate all of these realities, there’s a certain place of locating and finding possibility, or different possibilities, of who you can be and how you can be..... My etchings are made trying to invent, make sense, or excavate my own mark making and language.” – Mehretu, 2013 recorded interview



Ann Messner

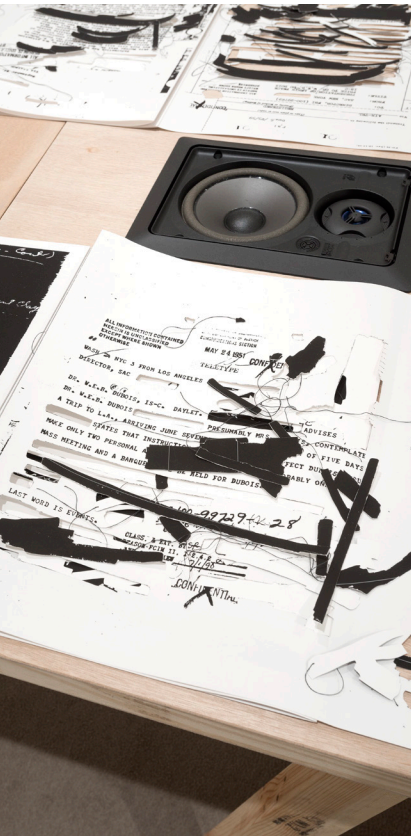
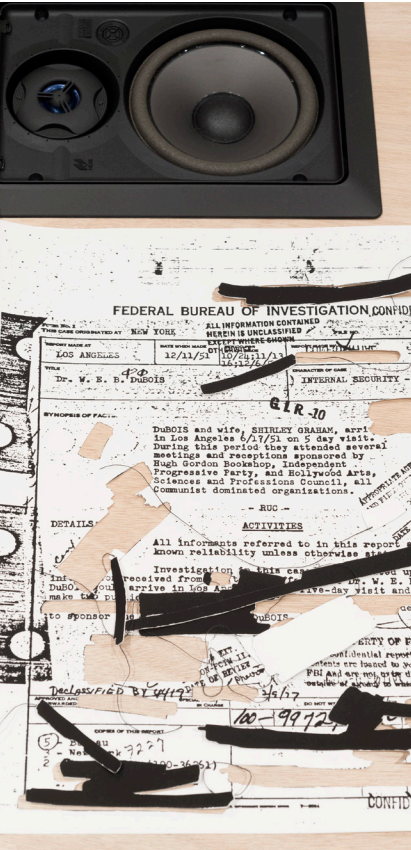
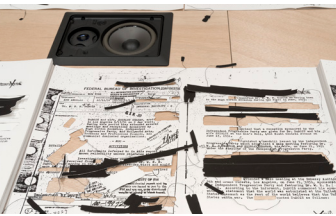
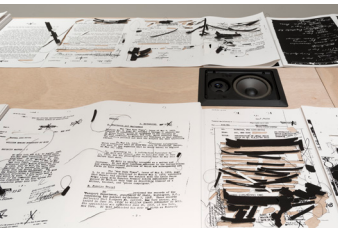
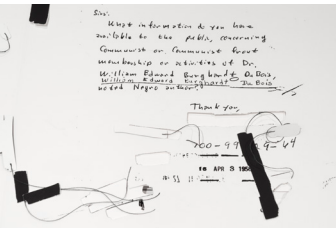
Ann Messner was born in NYC in 1952 and lives in Brooklyn. She is a research-based artist whose practice engages in a discursive process of questioning and problem solving. Her work centers an exploration of the relationship between the individual body and the body politic, through multiple strategies of sculpture, installation, performance, film/video, and guerilla-style public intervention. Eschewing a signature style, her practice kneads at the pliability of the social contract, probing at the membrane that separates collective and individual conscious realities. She is recipient of the NYFA Award in Sculpture (1987, 1989); the National Endowment Individual Artist Award (1987); a Guggenheim Fellowship (1996); the Anonymous Was a Woman Award (1998); and a Gottlieb Foundation Fellowship (2004). She has been appointed a Postgraduate Fellowship, Bath College of Higher Education, UK; Henry Moore Foundation (1995-6); Fellow Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University (1999-2000); and Senior Fellow Princeton University Council on the Humanities (2001-2). She was until recently a tenured Professor of MFA Integrated Practices at Pratt Institute. She is currently Professor Emerita.

“Researching the life of Du Bois I was struck by how shameless was the US government’s ongoing surveillance into both the private and public life of the man and his close associates; surveillance fueled by both anti-communist hysteria and xenophobic fear. All the more remarkable remains Du Bois’ unwavering commitment to his life’s work despite unsettling intimidation. The W.E.B. Du Bois FBI files, declassified in 1990, provide confirmation of the extent of invasive government surveillance. The heavy-handed black redaction through-

out the documents gives proof of suppression of evidence, and yet, make apparent the contempt for black intellectual life, ideological bigotry and the harassing nature of continual surveillance by the State.

Project: Precisely excised, each redaction remains deliberately tethered to its attending void space, a ghost doppelgänger. Intentionally evoked is the labyrinthine lived experience of double consciousness. Cutting out does not cancel evidence of power’s duplicity and betrayal. Out of the speakers embedded within the surface of the table we hear chronicles of spoken word and song. The aural has its way of conjuring emotional space, claiming solace as you are summoned to listen.” – Messner

Ann Messner
Du Bois: The FBI Files, 2013
47 running foot incised digital scroll; 22 foot table inset with 6 in-wall MP5 Niles speakers, CD players, 4 CDs
Collection of the University Museum of Contemporary Art, University of Massachusetts Amherst. Gift of Ann Messner.



Jefferson Pinder

Jefferson Pinder (b. 1970, Washington, D.C.) produces performance-based and multidisciplinary work. He gained national attention with the exhibition *Frequency* at The Studio Museum in Harlem in 2006. In all his work, Pinder applies his knowledge of music, imagery, and performance to address complex issues of race, ethnicity, and class. His performances and videos reflect on racism and trauma with the hope of inspiring dialogue about history and the potential for change.

Pinder’s work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions at The Studio Museum in Harlem; the Wadsworth Athenaeum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut; The High Museum, Atlanta; the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; and Tate Modern in London, UK. In 2017, Pinder received a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 2016 he won a USA Joyce Fellowship Award in the field of performance, and in 2017 the Moving Image Acquisition Award. Most recently, he was named a 2021 Smithsonian Artist Research Fellow. Pinder received a BA in Theatre and an MFA in Mixed Media from the University of Maryland, and studied at the Asolo Theatre Conservatory in Sarasota, FL. He was an Assistant Professor at the University of Maryland from 2003-2011. He is currently Professor of Sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

“*[Du Bois] really understood the power of art that made people understand race, and particularly human relations.*” – Pinder

Jefferson Pinder
float, 2019
HD digital video recording of performance [Lake Michigan, Chicago, IL, 2019]
8 minutes, 46 seconds
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Orlando Pinder



Mickalene Thomas

Mickalene Thomas (b. 1971, Camden, NJ; lives in Brooklyn) makes paintings, collages, photography, video, and installations that draw on art history and popular culture to create a contemporary vision of female sexuality, beauty, and power. Thomas received a BFA from Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY, in 2000 and an MFA from Yale University School of Art, New Haven, CT, in 2002. *Mickalene Thomas: All About Love* (2024) was the first major international tour focused on her work, co-organized by the Hayward Gallery, (London) and The Broad (LA) in partnership with the Barnes Foundation (Philadelphia) and Les Abattoirs, Musée–Frac Occitanie (Toulouse, France).

Solo exhibitions of her work have been at The Dayton Art Institute, OH (2018); Henry Art Gallery, Seattle (2018); Pomona College Museum of Art, Claremont, CA (2018); Georgia Museum of Art, Athens, GA (2017); Newcomb Art Museum, Tulane University, New Orleans (2017); Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta (2017); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2016); Aspen Art Museum (2016); Aperture Foundation, New York (2016); George Eastman Museum, Rochester (2014); Brooklyn Museum (2012-13); Santa Monica Museum of Art (2012); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2012); Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2011); and La Conservera Centro de Arte Contemporaneo, Ceuti, Spain (2009). Thomas’ work resides in many collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Art Institute of Chicago; MoMA PS1, New York; Brooklyn Museum, New York; and Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo.

Mickalene Thomas
Happy Birthday to a Beautiful Woman, 2012
Digital Video
23 minutes, 6 seconds
Courtesy of the artist

Installation view of *Happy Birthday to a Beautiful Woman*, as part of *I was Born to Do Great Things*, Kavi Gupta Gallery, Chicago, IL, 2014. © Mickalene Thomas. Courtesy of Mickalene Thomas Studio

“When I came to Du Bois, I came to thinking about his essays on women and African American women in particular, and our place and importance.”
– Thomas, 2013 recorded interview



Carrie Mae Weems

Carrie Mae Weems gives voice to people whose stories have been silenced or ignored. Investigating history, identity, and power, she finds connections between personal experience and the larger structures and institutions that shape our lives. She has built an acclaimed body of work using photographs, text, fabric, audio, digital images, installation, and video. Weems has brought together activists, artists, musicians, poets, theorists and writers, convening events such as *Past Tense/Future Perfect* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and *The Shape of Things* at the Park Avenue Armory, where Weems was artist-in-residence.

Weems’s selected solo exhibitions include the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; *Reflections for Now* at Barbican Art Gallery in London; *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* at Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, Germany; and *The Heart of the Matter* at the Gallerie d’Italia – Torino in Turin, Italy. Other recent highlights include the two-person show *Dawoud Bey & Carrie Mae Weems: In Dialogue* at the Grand Rapids Art Museum in Michigan, which traveled to the Getty Center in Los Angeles, the Seattle Art Museum, and the Tampa Museum of Art in Florida. Weems is currently the Artist in Residence at Syracuse University.

She has received numerous awards, grants, and fellowships, including a Hasselblad Award; a Bernd and Hilla Becher Prize; a MacArthur “Genius” grant; the U.S. State Department’s Medal of Arts; the National Medal of the Arts; the Joseph Hazen Rome Prize Fellowship from the American Academy in Rome; NEA grants; the Louis Comfort Tiffany Award; and the Congressional Black Caucus

Foundation’s Lifetime Achievement Award, among others. Her work resides in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and The Tate Modern, London, among others.

Carrie Mae Weems
Blue Notes (Claudia Lennear #2), 2014
Archival inkjet print with silkscreened color blocks
30 x 22 ¼ inches, Edition of 5 + 2AP, 2PP
© Carrie Mae Weems
Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery



Additional artworks exhibited

LaToya Ruby Frazier
Washington Avenue and Monongahela River, 2013
Archival pigment print
42 x 63 inches
Edition 1 of 5 + 2 APs
Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery

Julie Mehretu
Circulation, 2005
Color Hard ground etching with aquatint
and engraving on Gampi paper chine collé
27 ¼ x 39 ¼ inches [image size], 35 ½ x 46 ¾ inches [paper size]
Edition of 25, 5 artist proofs (AP 2/5)
Courtesy of the artist

Julie Mehretu
Local Calm, 2005
Sugar lift aquatint with aquatint, spit bit aquatint,
soft ground and hard ground etching and engraving
on Gampi paper chine collé
27 ¼ x 39 ¼ inches [image size], 35 ½ x 46 ¾ inches [paper size]
Edition of 35, 5 AP's (AP 2/5)
Courtesy of the artist

Carrie Mae Weems
Blue Notes (with The Rolling Stones), 2014
Archival inkjet print with silkscreened color blocks
30 x 22 ¼ inches
Edition 1 of 5 + 2 AP, 2 PP
© Carrie Mae Weems
Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery

Acknowledgments

Organizing *In Our Time* has been a tremendous privilege and an opportunity to revisit and extend the powerful conversations begun in the 2013 exhibition *Du Bois in Our Time* at The University Museum of Contemporary Art, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I am deeply grateful to curator Loretta Yarlow, whose vision and long-standing commitment to the legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois continue to inspire.

We are especially indebted to the eleven participating artists—Angel Abreu/Studio K.O.S., Derrick Adams, Radcliffe Bailey (in memoriam), LaToya Ruby Frazier, Theaster Gates, Jenny Holzer, Julie Mehretu, Ann Messner, Jefferson Pinder, Mickalene Thomas, and Carrie Mae Weems—for their powerful contributions. Their work brings Du Bois’s insights into vibrant dialogue with the urgent questions of our time, offering new forms of witness, critique, and possibility.

We would like to thank the studios, galleries, and representatives who facilitated the loan of artworks and images for this exhibition.

At Pratt Manhattan Gallery, this project would not have been possible without the extraordinary talents of our staff: Ted Holland, Assistant Director; Grace Abbott, Gallery Coordinator; Travis Molkenbur, Head Preparator; and installation technicians Jun Ishida, Eliette Mitchell, Peter Schenck, and Scott Whipkey. Their attention to detail and commitment to excellence have brought this exhibition to life. We are also grateful to our student assistants, whose energy and dedication enliven all our efforts.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of Pratt Institute’s leadership and faculty, especially those who have embraced this exhibition as a resource for teaching, dialogue, and engagement. We are thankful for their partnership in expanding the reach and impact of *In Our Time* within our academic community.

Finally, to W.E.B. Du Bois, whose prophetic insights continue to illuminate the contours of justice, resistance, and imagination—we dedicate this exhibition in honor of your enduring legacy.

Sincerely,

Nick Battis
Director of Exhibitions
Pratt Manhattan Gallery

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Angel Abreu/Studio K.O.S.
Derrick Adams
Radcliffe Bailey
LaToya Ruby Frazier
Theaster Gates
Jenny Holzer
Julie Mehretu
Ann Messner
Jefferson Pinder
Mickalene Thomas
Carrie Mae Weems

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