

HYPERALLERGIC

ARTICLES

Best of 2018: Our Top 20 Exhibitions Across the United States

Art visualizing identity and community took center stage in our top 20 exhibitions across the United States for 2018.



Hyperallergic December 20, 2018



Of 72 by Ebony Patterson (detail view) (image by Sarah Rose Sharp)

In 2018, artists and curators across the United States have been crafting brilliant exhibitions across the US, exploring themes of identity and community in innovative ways. Ebony G. Patterson made a maximalist tribute to victims of violence in her

home country of Jamaica, while Joel Otterson crafted work recalling his parents' professions as a seamstress and plumber. Indigenous artists took the stage at the Anchorage Museum's *Unsettled* and Jeffrey Gibson's *This is the Day* at the Wellin Museum. The enthralling official Obama portraits,

painted by Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sberald, were revealed at the National Gallery in DC, putting Black fine artists into the national consciousness. This list is an insight into the tastes of our US writers and the shows that moved them.

1. *Gordon Parks: The New Tide, Early Work 1940–1950* at the National Gallery of Art



Gordon Parks, Washington, D.C. Government chairwoman, July 1942. Gelatin silver print mounted to board with typewritten caption sheet (image courtesy Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.)

November 4, 2018–February 18, 2019

Gordon Parks taught millions of white Americans how to see Black people anew. Although he was as comfortable shooting fashion and celebrities as he was photographing the Black Panthers, his claim to greatness as a photographer rests on the *Life* magazine photo-essays that made him one of the mid-20th century's foremost interpreters of African American culture and society. [*Gordon Parks: The New Tide, Early Work*](#)

[1940–1950](#) explores new territory as it traces Parks's emergence as an artist and documentarian of rare power and creativity. Parks made

the earliest photographs in the exhibition while he was struggling to establish himself as a portrait and news photographer in St. Paul, Minnesota, and supporting his family primarily through his job as a railroad dining car porter. Only 10 years later, he was an accomplished — even visionary — professional photographer and a member of *Life's* staff. It would have been an impressive accomplishment for anyone, but for an African American in a still-segregated society, it was astonishing. The 150 portraits and documentary photographs in *The New Tide*, curated by Philip

Brookman, show how it happened. The critical years were 1940 to 1944, during which Parks absorbed much of the political and aesthetic radicalism of the Black Chicago Renaissance and the then-groundbreaking approach of the federal government's Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information (FSA/OWI) documentary project. No photograph in the exhibition exemplifies this marriage between the concern for racial justice and the impulse to document better than his now iconic 1942 portrait of Ella Watson, a government housekeeper for whom the promises of American democracy were empty words. —*John Edwin Mason*

2. Jeffrey Gibson: *This is the Day* at the Wellin Museum



Installation view of Jeffrey Gibson: *This Is the Day* at the Ruth and Elmer Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College, Clinton, NY (image by Seph Rodney)

September 8–December 9

As Tracy Adler, the curator of Jeffrey Gibson's [*This Is the Day*](#) exhibition at the Wellin Museum said to me, Gibson could go on continuing to make his famous heavy bag pieces for the next umpteen years and his admirers

would still value his practice. But clearly, Gibson wouldn't be satisfied with becoming an artist who behaves like a glib mini-factory producing pleasing objects. His show at the Wellin showcases his breadth and depth of making, with larger-than-life-size sewn tunics (decorated with what he likes to call "powwow regalia"), extravagantly decorated masks, ceramic pots, paintings made of exquisitely patterned thread, capes, tapestries, and figures — even a short video. *This is the Day* feels like a very big and searching exhibition, as it is genuinely an exploration of ethnic heritage and all the ways it might be refracted by personal experience. —*Seph Rodney*

3. **SITELINES** | *Casa tomada* at SITE Santa Fe



Curtis Talwst Santiago, "Deluge VII" (2016), mixed media diorama in a reclaimed jewelry box, (image courtesy the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery)

August 3, 2018–January 6, 2019

The SITElines biennial at SITE Santa Fe has existed since 1995, but this year it enjoyed an expanded building and impressive guest curators José Luis Blondet, Candice Hopkins, Ruba Katrib, and advisor Naomi Beckwith. Titled *Casa tomada*, after the 1946 book in which owners are forced from their home by an unseen entity, the

biennial offers pivoting but coherent expressions of displacement. The highlights included Curtis Talwst Santiago's *Infinity Series* (2008–ongoing) displayed in a glass house, and Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa's commissioned "Revindication of Tangible Property" (2018). Despite an expansive theme prescribed to 23 artists from eight countries, SITElines challenged all expectations, proving biennials can be high stakes when innovatively curated. —Kealey Boyd

4. *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture, 1963–2017* at the Baltimore Museum of Art



Jack Whitten, "Lucy" (2011), black mulberry, mixed media, Phaistos stone, mahogany, metal I-beam (image courtesy the artist, photo by

April 22–July 29

Compared to his monumental, mosaic-inspired abstract paintings, Jack Whitten's carved wooden assemblages are intimate, raw, and intuitive — but no less powerful. This ground-breaking exhibition, curated by Katy Siegel

Genevieve Hanson)

and Kelly Baum, presented decades of never-seen-before sculptural works created in his summer studio in Crete, full of totems, guardian figures, icons, and memorial reliquaries made from carved wood, marble, stone, acrylic, fish bones, plastic credit cards, photos, handwritten letters, and random scraps. Whitten's sculptures are deliciously rebellious and fiercely lyrical, bursting with personal narrative, as well as African, Classical, and literary allusions, though their impact upon his accumulative, jazz-inspired paintings is clearer in the show's second iteration at [The Met Breuer](#), where 3D works and paintings hang side-by-side to emphasize their parallels. [At the BMA](#), however, they were relegated to separate galleries, which emphasized their obvious disparities. —*Cara Ober*

5. *Ebony G. Patterson: Of 72* at Institute for the Humanities Gallery at the University of Michigan



Of 72 by Ebony Patterson, detail view (image by Sarah Rose Sharp)

January 11–February 9

With her mixed-media installation, [Of 72](#), artist Ebony G. Patterson asks a very straightforward question: “What happens when seventy-two men and one woman dies and no one knows who they are?” Patterson, a native Jamaican, is raising this question in connection to the 2010 armed conflict between the Shower Posse drug cartel and Jamaica’s military and police, which resulted in the killing of at least 73 civilians. The installation, curated by Amanda Krugliak, is comprised of mixed-media work on fabric with digital imagery, embroidery, rhinestones, trimmings, bandanas, and floral appliqués. The exhibition does not really answer these questions in a literal sense, but presents photographs, digitally

printed onto fabric and each mounted onto a rainbow of ornately decorated bandanas, to represent the known victims of the Tivoli Incursion. The scene is wildly colorful, achingly detailed, and beautiful. When Patterson learned that 72 men and one woman died and no one knew who they were, she made a tribute that sings in their memory.

—Sarah Rose Sharp

6. *Scalar, A Solo Exhibition by Torkwase Dyson at the Usdan Gallery*



Installation view of *Scalar, A Solo Exhibition* by Torkwase Dyson at the Suzanne Lemberg Usdan Gallery, Bennington College; from left to right: “I Can Feel You Now (Accumulation/Distribution)” (2018); “1994 (Rate of Transformation #Scale)” (2018); “Up South 3 (Water Table)” (2018); “Up South 4 (Water Table)” (2018) (works on view courtesy Torkwase Dyson; Davidson Gallery, New York; and Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, photo by Arthur Evans)

September 18–December 15

Torkwase Dyson’s paintings in *Scalar* crash like waves in the dark, as seismic as they are surreptitious, creating intimate frameworks for rethinking materiality, form, and spatial and environmental politics in the process. Two onyx-black panels, one mounted and the other leaning on a tiny chrome balance beam, make up “I Can Feel You Now (Accumulation/Distribution)” (2018), a 12 by 20-foot diptych painted on site at Bennington

College. It both commands the room and draws viewers close with blips of white paint suggesting some code or measurement of scale. The works in *Scalar*, which was curated by Anne Thompson, question how forms in our landscape become subconscious and serialized, and either help or hinder Black bodies moving through it. Dyson’s tondos in *Scalar* can also be seen as pipelines through the earth cleaved open, runnels of paint revealing the hand as gesture — but more importantly, the hand as conscious and considerate of what it touches and builds, or destroys and leaves behind. —Alex Jen

7. *Dark Matter: Joel Otterson at John Michael Kohler Arts Center*



Installation view of *Dark Matter: Joel Otterson* at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 2018 (image by Seph Rodney)

August 5, 2018–January 20, 2019

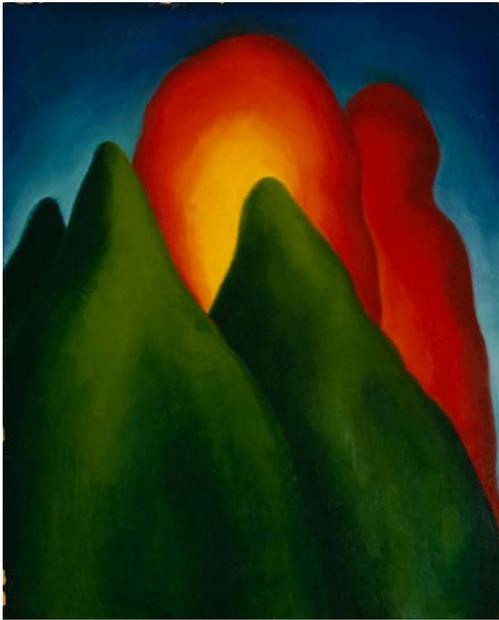
The idea of an artist founding his practice on slowly making his way through a house is already fascinating, but Joel Otterson, being influenced by both his seamstress mother and plumber father, weaves together crafts that have traditionally been demarcated

by gender: sewing versus welding. In [*Dark Matter: Joel Otterson*](#), curated by Karen Patterson with Faythe Levine and mounted at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Otterson brought these activities together in enormous rooms that he decorated with sumptuous, hanging tapestries and brass armatures lacquered with vibrant colors and shaped to resemble the amphorae that had inspired the artist. Everything in this show: the brass pieces, the textiles, and the varnished wood presentation boxes looked like they all required a great deal of labor to finish, and were initially birthed in a deep respect and adoration for the gifts a mother and father gave their son. —*Seph Rodney*

8. *Unexpected O’Keeffe: The Virginia Watercolors and Later Paintings at the Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia*

October 19, 2018–January 27, 2019

Full of surprises, [*Unexpected O’Keeffe: The Virginia Watercolors and Later Painting*](#) more than lives up to its name. The revelatory exhibition at the University of Virginia’s Fralin Museum of Art explores little known, yet vitally important work that Georgia O’Keeffe produced during five critical



Georgia O'Keeffe, "Anything" (1916), oil on board, 20 x 15 3/4 inches (image courtesy Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, gift of The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum [2006.5.29])

summers that she spent studying and teaching at the university. When she arrived in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1912 to enroll in summer classes for female art teachers, she was troubled and unsure of her future as an artist. Her coursework, however, introduced her to the thinking of Arthur Wesley Dow, a painter, printmaker, and teacher, whose ideas about art as personal expression renewed her enthusiasm for her own work. Watercolors that O'Keeffe produced during her summers in Charlottesville comprise the bulk

of the exhibition and amply demonstrate that her enthusiasm was warranted. While representational, their bold, simplified forms show her early embrace of modernism and move toward abstraction. *Unexpected O'Keeffe* marks the first time that the watercolors have been exhibited outside of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico. University students were entrenched in the curation and primary research for the exhibition. Johnathan Chance, Lucia Colombari, Lauren McQuiston, and Meaghan Walsh worked under the direction of Professor Elizabeth Hutton Turner within the McIntire Department of Art, and Matthew McLendon, J. Sanford Miller Family Director. —*John Edwin Mason*

9. Candice Lin: A Hard White Body, a Porous Slip at the Logan Center Gallery, UChicago Arts

September 14–October 28



Candice Lin: A Hard White Body, a Porous Slip, 2018, installation view in the Logan Center Gallery (photo by Robert Chase Heishman)

Although mainstream discussions of white supremacy in the United States center around Eurocentric whiteness, *Candice Lin: A Hard White Body, a Porous Slip* challenges us to think more complexly about how prejudice and perception can also be informed by non-human material within the history of global trade. Curated by Yesomi

Umolu with Katja Rivera, the Logan Center Gallery was transformed by a false floor, which housed a large pool of water containing Lin's research material, porcelain fragments, and plastic sheeting on which a video projection played. In this strange ecosystem, *A Hard White Body* references how Europeans described (and perversely humanized) Chinese porcelain, inviting us to consider how Orientalist desire for an Asiatic material inspired notions of whiteness and modernity. —*Danielle Wu*

10. *Inventur—Art in Germany, 1943–55* at the Harvard Art Museums



February 9–June 3

Inventur—Art in Germany, 1943–55, curated by Lynette Roth at the Harvard Art Museums, was a triumph of art historical scholarship, and a daunting one at that. The exhibition featured over 150 works by nearly 50 German artists, all working during or just after the war. Despite moral complexities that abound, the larger questions seem to pale in the face of such human suffering.

Willi Baumeister, “Untitled” (“*Ohne Titel*”) (1941), lacquer and pigment powder on wallboard, 11 1/2 × 7 7/8 inches (image courtesy Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, LG-341, © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, photo by Kunstmuseum Stuttgart)

Resigned, in a sense, to the restoration of order (whether personal or historical), the work included here becomes a secondary coda to the enormous upheaval and

despair unleashed by the Nazis in Europe before, during, and after the second World War. The current rise of the alt-right in the United States and abroad underlines the importance of looking backward in time, especially now, when democracy feels so precarious. —*Robert Moeller*

11. *XianRui: Ten years at the Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco*



Stella Zhang, “Things Fall Apart” (2018) (image by Alpesh Kantilal Patel)

April 7–September 22

In 2008, Abby Chen, Chinese Culture Center’s former artistic director and chief curator who was recently announced as the first head of San Francisco’s Asian Art Museum’s contemporary art department, launched an annual exhibition series titled *XianRui* that would give a US-based artist of

Chinese descent — whose works are “unrecognized or under recognized” per the institution’s website — a platform to exhibit new works. [*XianRui: Ten years*](#), curated by Abby Chen, Ziyang Duan, and Hoi Leung, includes the most recent work of six of the artists who were previously selected: Beili Liu, Dora Hsiung, Stella Shang, Zheng Chongbin, Adrian Wong, and Summer Mei-Ling Lee. *XianRui* means “fresh” and “sharp,” and it perfectly described not only the works of the artists when originally selected, but also their more recent artistic production on display.

—*Alpesh Patel*

12. *Two Works* at the SCAD Museum of Art



Opera for a Small Room (image courtesy SCAD)

February 13–July 18

At Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller’s *Two Works*, curated by Storm Janse van Rensburg at the SCAD Museum of Art, one of these two works undeniably stood out. In *Opera for a Small Room*, Cardiff and Miller — best known for their

immersive multimedia sound installations — staged a dimly lit cabin-like structure at the center of a dark gallery. Providing the only light in the space, this interior within an interior called to mind the refrain from Frank Bidart’s *To the Dead*: “That is the house within the house/There is a night within the night.” Like all good poetry — although the world Cardiff and Miller created is economy-sized — it spoke volumes. In it, 24 antique loudspeakers played arias and occasional pop tunes with the records changing as if by an invisible hand. In seconds, the inner-room, decorated like a den of nostalgia, would go from dim and subdued to electric with light and sound. There’s also a foreboding voice that provides intermittent narration, belonging, presumably, to whoever occupies this room: “She was walking down the road, with her shoes in her hand. Where the fuck was she going?” it ruminates. What is remarkable here is how Cardiff and Miller managed to give this figure’s subconscious physical shape in the architecture of a house. Behold, it is “the disenthraling, necessary, dreamed structure beneath the structure we see,” says Bidart — and a most satisfying metaphor at that. —*Chase Quinn*

13. *Unsettled* at the Anchorage Museum

April 20–September 9

Co-curated by artist Ed Ruscha and JoAnne Northrup, this exhibition — which originated at the Nevada Museum of Art last year — featured a wide range of artists dealing with issues of land, state violence, belonging, and



Brian Jungen, polyester, metal, painted wood on paper sonotube, 2007 (image courtesy Art Gallery of Ontario, © Brian Jungen 2017)

cultural continuity (among other things). It was a very strong show, with hardly a weak work in sight. If the curation at the Anchorage Museum was a little overhung, it made up for it with an impressive list of works by Brian Jungen, Nicholas Galanin, Wendy Red Star, Sonia Falcone, Bruno Fazzolari, and others. Seeing the show in Alaska was particularly poignant, as the process of colonization is less advanced in that state than anywhere else in the United States

— though it’s still ever-present. Seeing this exhibition, you may be able to imagine new possibilities for a future that may seem unsettling at first, but in reality, will help us all connect to each other and the land in new and more poignant ways. —*Hrag Vartanian*

14. Roberto Lugo Ceramics at the Walters Art Museum

June 16, 2018–July 14, 2019



Roberto Lugo, “Frederick Douglass Food Stamp Jar” (image courtesy Walters Art Museum)

Although contemporary ceramics tend to skew formal and functional, Roberto Lugo’s pottery harkens back to ancient storytelling traditions to address politics, war, sex, violence, and popular culture. Curated by Eleanor Hughes and Alexander Jarman and on display at [The Walters Art Museum](#), Lugo spent the past year creating new works inspired by the

museum’s historic holdings, which include ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman pottery and a Renaissance-era [della Robbia sculpture](#), as well as a historic letter written in 1861 by [Sybby Grant](#), an enslaved woman who worked as a cook in the original iteration of the building. He then blended these historic references with his own lived experience as an Afro-Latino person from urban Philadelphia. [This exhibit](#) is a shining example for other museums that specialize in [antiquities](#), where the presence of contemporary works, like Lugo’s “Frederick Douglass Food Stamp Jar” and “Slave Ship Potpourri Boat” deepen one’s understanding of analogous historic works and democratizes history itself, offering diverse and critical American narratives to a broadening cultural audience. —*Cara Ober*

15. *The Price of Our Clothes* at Pearlman Teaching Museum at Carleton College



Rachel Breen, “Shroud” (2018, detail) at the Pearlman Teaching Museum (image by Sheila Regan)

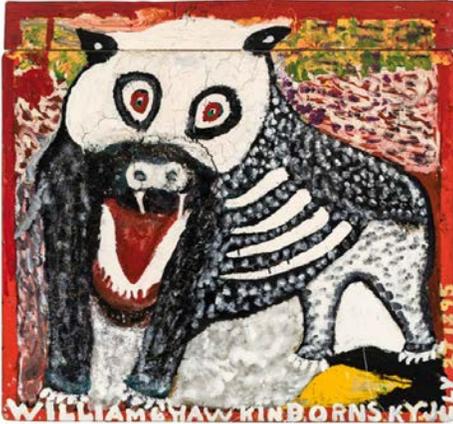
March 26–April 27

Entering the Perlman Teaching Museum at Carleton College during Rachel Breen and Alison Morse’s site-specific [The Price of Our Clothes](#) installation felt a bit like walking into a sacred space. A shroud of thousands of white shirts sewn together hung ominously from the ceiling, referencing both the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of 1911 in New York and the Rana Plaza collapses of 2013 in Bangladesh, two historical events that needlessly caused massive death and injury to garment industry workers. Breen’s staggering textile sculpture and accompanying drawings were paired with compelling poems written by

Morse, both printed around the gallery and available on listening devices.

—*Sheila Regan*

16. *William L. Hawkins: An Imaginative Geography* at the Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio



William Hawkins, “Tasmanian Tiger #2” (1986)
(image by Sarah Rose Sharp)

February 16–May 20

The work of influential outsider artist William L. Hawkins was gathered in unprecedented scope for his first major museum exhibition, [*William L. Hawkins: An Imaginative Geography*](#), the joint effort of Columbus Museum of Art (CMA) and the Figge Art Museum in Davenport, Iowa. Some 60-plus pieces of 2D and rare 3D work are

all the more impressive when one considers that Hawkins was not discovered or embraced by the art world until he was in his 80s. Most of his extant work comes from the single decade between his public debut when he took first prize at the 1982 Ohio State Fair, and his death in 1990. The exhibition, curated by Susan M. Crawley, embodies Hawkins’s daring and enterprising spirit, and with it, CMA continues its excellent track record of bringing the lesser-known and shining stars of Columbus contemporary art history into the spotlight. —*Sarah Rose Sharp*

17. *Nine Moments for Now* at Cooper Gallery

October 31, 2018–January 21, 2019

[*Nine Moments for Now*](#), curated by Dell Marie Hamilton, was an unexpected whammy of a show — a broad investigation of predominately



Chanel Thervil, “Pity Party: Selfies at the Start of the Trump Era,” (2017), acrylic on wood with pleated flag (image by Melissa Blackall Photography, courtesy the gallery)

Boston-based artists responding to, resisting, coping with, and exposing the violence of structural and outright racism. And a profound questioning of the integrity of the democratic process. The show’s themes range from the funerary — an entire corridor is lined with photography covering Martin Luther King’s death, activists lost to AIDS, and the mourning of some of the most iconic murders fueling the Black Lives Matter movement — to the infuriating, like Joy Buolamwini’s “AI, Ain’t I a Woman” — an exploration of how emerging technology is hard-coding a combination of racial and gender biases into machine learning. There are also celebrations of strength like L’Merchie Frazier’s sparkling quilted portrait, “Ericka Huggins: Liberation Groceries.” —*Heather Kapplow*

18. Joanne Greenbaum: *Things We Said Today* at the Tufts University Art Galleries



Partial view of Joanne Greenbaum: *Things We Said Today* installation (image courtesy Tufts University Art Galleries)

January 23–April 7

Joanne Greenbaum’s solo [exhibition](#) at the Tufts University Art Galleries at the SMFA, curated by Dina Deitsch, caught a painter at the height of her power.

Remarkably focused and articulate, Greenbaum’s work coalesces around disorder and anxiety before reforming seemingly disparate

ideas into a coherent whole. Her riotous approach to mark making is only a distraction. What emerges is an entire system built around the varying languages of abstraction, both historical and current. The jittery feel of

Greenbaum’s work never overwhelms, but rather reinforces her urge to push the paintings to the very limits of complexity and completeness. —*Robert Moeller*

19. *Many Visions, Many Versions at the Weisman Museum*



Ram Singh Urveti, “Woodpecker and the Ironsmith” (2011), acrylic on canvas (image courtesy Sneha Ganguly)

October 6, 2018–January 6, 2019

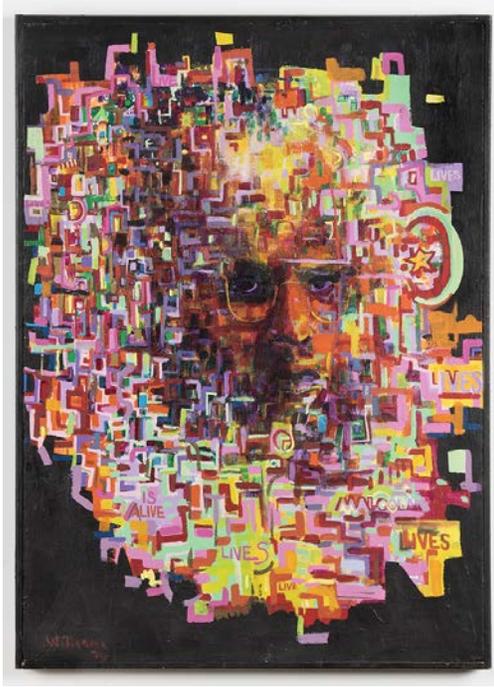
This astounding exhibition, organized by BINDU modern Gallery and curated by Dr. Aurogeeta Das, Dr. David Szanton, and Jeffrey Wechsler, explodes with patterns, dazzling colors, and nonlinear storytelling. A survey of contemporary artists working in Indigenous traditions throughout

India, the vivid pieces by 24 artists emanate with a powerful spirit. Manisha Jha’s intricate and wondrous “Tree of Life” paintings, Jangarh Singh Shyam’s strange and fantastic beasts, Rani Jha’s and Swarna Chitrakar’s bold treatment of political issues and current events, and Ram Singh Urveti’s mysterious depictions of Gods and myths, are just some of the remarkable works from this show. —*Sheila Regan*

20. *AfriCoBra: Messages to the People at the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami*

November 27, 2018–April 7, 2019

In 1968, five artists — Jeff Donaldson, Jae Jarrell, Wadsworth Jarrell, Barbara Jones-Hogu, and Gerald Williams — founded the collective African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists, or AfriCoBra. The group developed a striking visual complement to the Black Power Movement,



Gerald Williams "Malcolm" (1970), acrylic on canvas, 35 × 27 × 2 inches (image courtesy Gerald Williams/Kavi Gupta)

including the use of what the artists describe as “coolade colors.” In a brilliant curatorial move by Jeffreen M. Hayes, PhD, these bright hues replace expectedly white museum walls in the exhibition *AfriCoBra: Messages to the People*, organized on the occasion of AfriCobra’s 50th anniversary. The exhibition pulls together not only the work of the founders, but also that of a few of the group’s early members: Sherman Beck, Napoleon Jones-Henderson, Omar Lama, and Carolyn Lawrence. It also includes both early and contemporary works

of the artists. In addition, a special section devoted to photography from the Black Archives of the HistoryMiami Museum ensures the exhibition retains a specific connection to Miami. —*Alpesh Patel*

Honorable mentions:

Official Obama Portraits at the National Gallery



The official portraits by Kehinde Wiley (left) and Amy Serrald (right) (photo by Blair Murphy/Hyperallergic)

The unveiling and subsequent exhibition of President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama’s official portraits at the National Portrait Gallery might best be described as an ongoing cultural phenomenon, rather than an exhibition. Nine months later,

there are still crowds arriving to see them, and the Portrait Gallery gift shop is so full of Obama-related merch that it's easy to imagine, if only for a moment, that the portraits' subjects still occupy the White House. With rare exception, outgoing presidents have selected traditional portraitists for the works that are commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery. President Obama's selection of Kehinde Wiley was boundary-pushing, both in making Wiley the first Black artist selected for the commission and for bringing a far more contemporary sensibility to the task. Michelle Obama's selection of Amy Sherald, a Baltimore-based painter who had, at the time, a far lower profile than Wiley's, has brought the artist a new (and well-deserved) level of acclaim. Both selections illustrate the Obamas' dedication to supporting Black artists and cultural producers while using their power to expand the boundaries of America's political and cultural institutions. —*Blair Murphy*

Kara Walker's *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)* at the Smithsonian American Art Museum



Kara Walker, "Alabama Loyalists Greeting the Federal Gun-Boats," (2005) from the portfolio *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*, offset lithograph and screenprint on paper, 39 x 53 inches (image courtesy Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, © 2005 Kara Walker)

October 13, 2017–March 11, 2018

This small but powerful exhibition at the Smithsonian American Art Museum presented Kara Walker's *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)* alongside a selection of the original Harper's images, all drawn from the Smithsonian American Art Museum's permanent collection. Published in 1866, the Harper's history claimed a strict impartiality, a "both sides-ing" of the Civil War

that promised to "praise no man unduly because he strove for the right; to malign no man because he strove for the wrong." Walker disturbs this

supposed neutrality by inserting her own silhouetted figures into the lithographs. The artist's interventions act as a reminder of the racist violence that both formed and continues to shape the United States, while also demonstrating the ways that claims to neutrality and authority rely on the suppression of conflicting narratives and histories. Presenting Walker's full portfolio, while providing additional context regarding the original document it interrogates, SAAM's exhibition was both historical and timely. —*Blair Murphy*