

**DAVID HAMMONS
FIVE DECADES**



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MNUCHIN GALLERY

When we visited David Hammons together at his studio in Harlem in the fall of 2010, we were already long-standing admirers of his work. Having followed his career for years and mounted an exhibition of his *Fur Coats* in 2007, we looked forward to this visit with great anticipation. Nothing could have prepared us for the shock of encountering what was then his latest series, the *Tarp* paintings: bright, abstract and ostensibly beautiful *painted* canvases (albeit sullied by torn sheets of plastic and drop cloths!). David had, once again, completely upended our expectations. Of course, that was to become our immensely successful show of *Tarp* paintings in the winter of 2011. It also laid the foundation for a dream that has now become a reality.

We are proud and privileged to present “David Hammons: Five Decades.” This exhibition is the first survey of Hammons' work in 25 years, and the first time viewers will have the opportunity to experience the entire arc of the artist's remarkable career, spanning from the late 1960s to the present. We are deeply appreciative to have Hammons' support.

Over the last five decades, Hammons has repeatedly transformed our understanding of what can be art, and what art can be. He always keeps us guessing, and thinking, and often chuckling out loud, upon recognizing one of his puns. He has never stopped reinventing his approach to his enduring themes, and finding new materials for us to ponder—whether we encounter them on the streets of New York, or in the galleries of the Modern. Hammons is truly one of the most original, and most revolutionary, artists of our time.

First and foremost, we would like to thank Hammons for creating these works. We are indebted to the five museums and numerous private collections who, despite the works' fragility and prominent positions in their galleries and homes, believed in the importance of sharing them with the public and have therefore entrusted us with their loans. We extend our sincere appreciation to our authors, Alanna Heiss, Kellie Jones, and Robert Storr for sharing their insights, wisdom, and personal experiences with the artist. We thank our catalogue designers, McCall Associates, for their inspired design. We extend a special thanks to our in-house exhibitions team, Liana Gorman and Nicole Hudson, for their important contributions.

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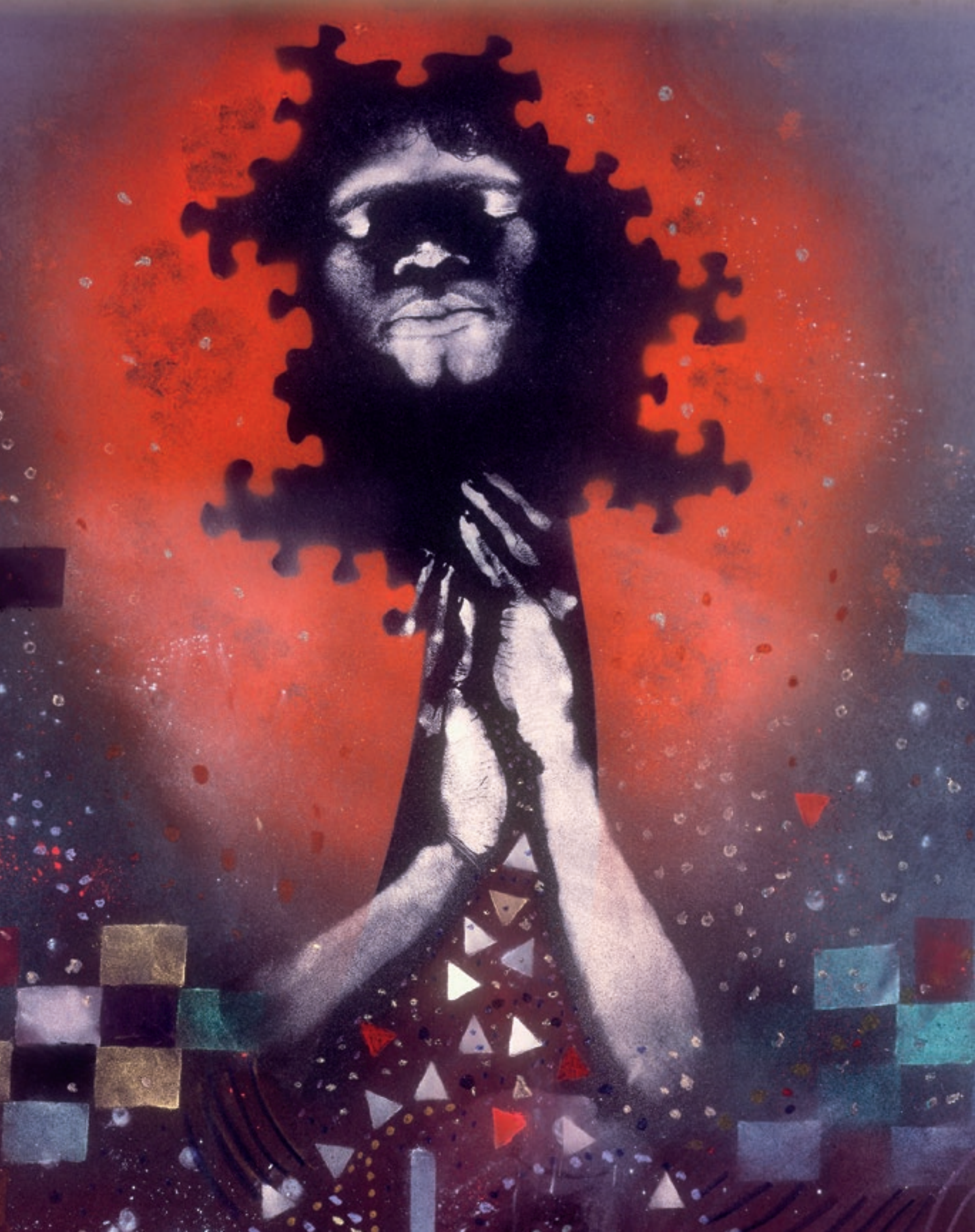
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BR'ER HAMMONS

BY ROBERT STORR

You never know when he'll show up. Once when I'd fallen asleep on the F train in Brooklyn I was awakened at Borough Hall by nails tapping on the window above my head; it was David. Another time he showed up unannounced at my office at the Museum of Modern Art with a monograph on Christo into which he'd inserted pictures of Tupac Shakur so as to pun on wrapping and rapping. I wish I still had it but—also unannounced—he came back later to reclaim this uniquely scruffy artist's book, assuming, correctly, that I had fully enjoyed it in his absence. Possession may be nine tenths of the law but contrary to art world Tulipmania of recent decades, it is not true of art.

And, you never know where he'll suddenly show up. Or show. Indeed keeping an eye out for his appearances, many of which are strategically made outside or in the periphery of the art world, is akin to following a Situationist Psychogeographic map of the city—and of the world. To slightly shift the frame of reference, Hammons might best be seen as a uniquely African-American incarnation of Charles Baudelaire's archetypal urban wanderer. *Le flaneur*, as “Chuck B” called him. A character who, it should be added, is a variant on another nineteenth-century archetype dear to Symbolist poets, the Dandy, that self-made man of taste distinguished by idiosyncratically stylish dress. Or, bringing it down to the street, the *flaneur*/Dandy's naturally *unnatural* habitat, exceptionally “good threads,” which Hammons habitually sports in vivid contrast to the exquisite funkiness of his art supplies, most of which he, as an unrivalled urban scavenger, finds on those same streets. The quintessential embodiment of this persona in Hammons work is the protagonist of his inspired video *Phat Free*, 1995–99, in which the artist noisily kicks a can through the nocturnal streets of Harlem, creating his own psychogeographic map of that storied, hard knocks part of the city as it had long been and still was when on the cusp of gentrification.

Streets and vacant lots have been Hammons' preferred showcases as well. In 1983 he sold snowballs in winter on a blanket near Cooper Union along with other curbside vendors of urban flotsam and jetsam (fig. 1). In 1985 he built and decorated a quasi-geodesic modernist pavilion with found materials—scrap wood, cardboard posters, Thunderbird Bottles, beer bottle caps—and staged performances that included a jam by Sun Ra and his Philadelphia-based Arkestra. In 1986 he raised ornamented telephone poles bearing unreachable basketball hoops in parks in Brooklyn and empty places in Harlem, and at various times he left traces and prompted treasure hunts by secreting ephemeral objects and images in and out of the way Lower East Side venues such as Tribes and Knobkerry, venues so far from the main

David Hammons, *Untitled (Body Print)*, 1975, mixed media on paper, 39 × 29 inches (99.1 × 73.7 cm) (detail).
Private collection.



Fig. 1 David Hammons, *Blizzard Ball Sale*, 1983, Cooper Square, New York.

thoroughfares of the art crowd—but so close to his communities of choice—that one can only say that Hammons is a conjurer of contradictory artistic stances, among them the sincere populist and the big league but hard-to-get provocateur.

Put another way Hammons offers the best, most beautifully crafted, most conceptually dense and difficult work to his neighbors—although assertively, even aggressively aestheticized in a way that hers rarely is and his consistently was, Hammons is every bit as much a rigorous Conceptualist as Adrian Piper or Felix Gonzalez-Torres—while providing the most defiantly displeasing and challenging “products” of his apparently off-hand labor to the carriage trade; for example, the despoiled fur coats he presented in recent years at this uptown gallery between Madison and Park Avenues, and the assemblages with tattered plastic sheeting and faux expressionist brushwork that followed them. One could say that Hammons knows his public and has something for everyone, but seldom what they expect, and frequently not at all what they could be counted on to want. Moreover, biting the hand that feeds is among the oldest of avant-garde maneuvers. After all, Jackson Pollock pissed in Peggy Guggenheim’s fire place and Piero Manzoni canned his own shit, satirizing the sadomasochistic exchange of art (the proudly presented primal product of the artist) for “filthy lucre” (the pride of wealthy collectors). So it is surprising how startled each generation of bountiful art lovers is to discover that artists are not pets. Nor can patrons ever afford to forget the fundamental truth of the irascible, reclusive David Smith’s dictum “Art is a luxury that artists pay for.”

Meanwhile, it is not as if Hammons' career has mostly taken place in or even been primarily focused on "the hood." A quick review of his exhibitions over the past three decades include most of the major museums of modern and contemporary art and international "biennials" from New York to Basel, London to Tokyo, Kassel to Venice and even to that bastion of traditional aesthetic and scholarly verities, the American Academy in Rome, where he teamed up to exhibit with Janis Kounellis. In fact from the very start it is plain that he has set his *higher goals* as high as they come. Specifically that has meant escaping the sorry fate of ghettoization while slipping the noose of becoming a token "black" artist in a predominantly "white" art world.

Successfully navigating the treacherous currents of artistic fashion and political expediency in institutions and markets within a cultural context designed for others, yet perennially inhospitable to The Other, has required exceptional skill and extraordinary guile on Hammons' part, like that of Odysseus sailing between Scylla and Charybdis. In an insightful essay by the late, lamented jack-of-all-artistic trades John Perrault—it takes one to know one—the impish painter/critic evoked the trope of the Trickster to describe Hammons' simultaneous ubiquity and elusiveness, playfulness and fierce criticism and caricature of racial and social norms. From the ancient Norse demiurge Loki to the antebellum Southern prankster Br'er Rabbit,¹ the Trickster is a troublemaker embodying an innately but nevertheless fully self-conscious spirit of rebellion.

Moreover, despite his insistent emphasis on the aesthetics and values of the African Diaspora and its North American permutations, Hammons is an avowed cosmopolitan with a profound affinity for Italian *arte povera*—specifically Kounellis—and its precedents—notably Alberto Burri, whom Hammons met in 1990—as well as its off-shoots—first and foremost Burri-inspired Robert Rauschenberg. Not that Hammons is in any sense their epigone. Rather he is speaking a corresponding but differently-inflected creole of damage and detritus, of conflicted histories and chance poetic hybridity, of the beauty of dilapidated and abandoned things that evoke realities outside the mainstream, and commemorate the existence, struggles and survival of marginalized groups and individuals that both Burri and Rauschenberg attended to in very different ways and settings. In sum, Br'er David isn't trailing behind Br'er Alberto and Br'er Bob or mirroring Br'er Janis, he's hightailing it back and forth and around their tracks in order to leap ahead and cut his own path, making elegant Nicholas Brothers and Savion Glover-like moves as he goes.

Having said all of this, let me come back to Hammons' emergence on the art scene during the early 1970s and to his early, antic, angry, wondrously grotesque body prints. He and they were caught up in the brief wave of museum and market enthusiasm for African-American artists and art that came in the wake of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, and then, like most of those artists and much of that work, were stranded on the threshold of recognition as the wave ebbed, and business-as-usual resumed. Doubtless chastened by this experience, as were many of his African-American contemporaries who are now being "offered a second chance" – Piper, Mel Edwards, Stanley Whitney and other insufficiently prominent talents among them – Hammons decided to go it alone, to make his work without regard for consensus taste and to "show up" when and where he saw fit.

Since we are speaking in a present dominated by tactical conservatism of a long ago radical past typified by direct action, we should remember that the revolutionary strategist who informed many insurrectional tendencies of that remote time was the formidable Mao Tse Tung, whose road to power consisted of building support in the provinces before attempting a conquest of the major cities. Arguably Hammons-the-Trickster is also Hammons the latter-day Maoist, an aesthetic guerilla who has chosen the time, place and mode of attack on the citadels of authority with the utmost shrewdness and self-discipline, confident that those he was targeting were paying less attention than he to the vulnerability of their positions and the limits of that authority. It is not for nothing that he admires ceaselessly evolving, uncompromisingly Afrocentric Malcolm X as well as the science fictional, intergalactic prophet of free jazz Sun Ra. And not for nothing that he also felt a fellowship with Miles Davis, the most virtuosic, agile, and unpredictable of bebop to fusion jazz innovators ever to make a bid for mainstream success even as he protected and constantly fertilized his roots. While at work on his installation for MoMA's 1991 survey of contemporary installation art, "DISLOCATIONS," Hammons learned of the trumpeter's death and brought a loaded boom box into the empty gallery, where he danced a mournful *pas de deux* with it, playing Miles' music. The dissonant lyricism of that sound resonating in the void of the White Cube space might be regarded as both a metaphor of the predicament of the Afro-American artist in the modernist context, but also as a key to the fundamental lyricism of Hammons' own sensibility. For as disarming and disorienting as the sometimes subtle, sometimes obvious, sometimes suave, other times abrasive, criticality of his forms, images, materials and word games is, it seems that Hammons cannot help but make beauty out of ugliness, warm, alluring tableaux out of cast-off, threadbare rugs and desiccated, rancid fried chicken wings; elegant, almost rococo sconces out of bent coat hangers and burnt out cigarettes; exploding semi-abstract

cosmic constellations out of metal rods and nappy black hair swept up off the floors of Harlem barber shops; the aleatory, *informe* smudges of a basketball dribbled on white paper; bunched bicycle inner tubes attached to a derelict window frame like funeral crepe to a glass topped coffin, and much, much more.

Is it possible to be the lyrical visual poet of a revolutionary change in perspectives, an essential reorientation of our collective cultural bearings after a jarring disorientation of the fixed artistic and social compass, a far-ranging polycentric remapping of the art world after a prolonged siege of the formerly myopic Eurocentricism? Just ask David Hammons. That's the wager he has made. And, the hand he has dealt himself—openly, like a fearless card sharp, from the top, middle and bottom of the deck—he has played with captivating grace.

Robert Storr

Brooklyn 2016

Notes

1. Reconstruction-era writer Joel Chandler Harris recast traditional Gullah tales and the fables of Aesop and La Fontaine in “Negro” dialect in ways that conflate overtly and covertly racist icons with authentic African-American folklore. As told by Chandler’s black face ventriloquist’s dummy, “Uncle Remus,” they embody many of the tropes found in minstrel shows and pre- and postwar Hollywood movies from *Gone With the Wind* (1939) and Walt Disney’s cartoons, in particular *Song of the South* (1946), which features Uncle Remus. Nevertheless, the shape-shifting character of Br’er Rabbit—who issues from Bantu tradition, but in Yoruba and other African societies morphs into a spider or a tortoise—is guiltless of the stereotypes by which he has been enveloped in Chandler’s, and subsequently Disney’s, failed attempts to make “black” myths intelligible and acceptable to “white” audiences.



MY FRIEND DAVID

BY ALANNA HEISS

David Hammons grew up 30 miles from me. My town was small and his was big, too big and important for our basketball team to play. This was a pity, as I was a cheerleader for our little team and I would have liked to meet David in my cheerleader outfit of red and white, waving large red pompoms. However even without the costume, I have been a cheerleader of and for David from the first time I saw his work, and realized that a hugely important American artist had emerged in the United States.

It seemed to me that David's odd shamanistic talent sprang upon us, the NYC art community, as a strict priest would surprise a group of happy parishioners planning a bake sale. David kept himself and his art and his family apart and removed. His rules were numerous, and concessions were made rarely and reluctantly. He kept no telephone or fax, essential tools for art planning during the '80s.

Even I, who could claim to know the ABSOLUTE PLACE of David's childhood and thus could easily demystify any possibility of a messianic claim, was stumped. He agreed to do a show at P.S. 1, which became one of our most important exhibitions. I believe the primary reason was his respect and affection for Tom Finkelppearl, our curator. The show was complicated and wonderful and it changed many ways in which the artists in NYC looked at art. It was also absolute hell to organize. As David refused to be available by telephone, intricate systems were set up to contact him. The most familiar one I remember was that to meet him, you had to go to the corner of 125th Street by the Orange Julius stand and call a number. He would call you back, and come down and get you. Sometimes it would take a long time. Tom and I had long conversations about the show waiting for David to emerge from the protective cover of the Orange Julius sign.

I have worked with David in several exhibitions and he has always been correct and responsive in terms of his promises. But once his sense of mischief overcame him. During a party, he stole from my house a red velvet heart stuffed with some soft beans. It was a Valentine, given to me by my husband, and fun to hold in your hand. It was casually sitting on the windowsill and David couldn't resist the pun and the accompanied action. He literally "stole my heart." I couldn't imagine how it disappeared, and eventually he returned it with a confession. He had hoped, he said, to engage a process that would require my husband, a well-known trial lawyer, to pursue him. I think David likes to toy with ideas that propel others into actions outside their considered behavior.

He offers us these opportunities: to buy a snowball...to light a chandelier of fried chicken wings...to throw a basketball into a hoop 50 feet tall. We are always more thoughtful after seeing a work by David Hammons.

David Hammons, *Untitled (African American Flag)*, 1990, flying above P.S. 1 during his solo exhibition, "Rousing the Rubble," December 16, 1990 – February 10, 1991. It is flown above the museum again, twenty-five years later, during the exhibition "Greater New York," October 11, 2015 – March 7, 2016.



GOOD MIRRORS AIN'T CHEAP

BY KELLIE JONES

I. DROP THE MIC

Traveling back and forth between Los Angeles and New York for much of the 1970s, David Hammons had claimed New York as his home base by 1980, the year he was an artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem. However, it would be another decade before most of the artworld caught up with him. In 1990 he was awarded the Prix de Rome, and the following year a MacArthur Fellowship. These prestigious honors were followed by a survey exhibition, organized by Tom Finkelppearl at the P.S.1 Museum, that traveled across the country. By the end of the tour, Hammons, for all intents and purposes, was the hottest household name. He was a postminimalist phenomenon, an artist who cared little for artworld conventions, and one of the few African-American artists singled out as an international and artworld star. In an interesting parallel to Romare Bearden's breakout moment, Hammons was in his late forties, having pursued the muse for almost thirty years when he was "discovered."

In the 1960s and 1970s it was Hammons' body prints that first wowed the public. The popularity of these pieces turned on their figurative profiles and unique printing method as well as the quite literal indexing of the black body in themes of love (*Untitled*, ca. 1969; *The Kiss*, 1970), power (*Spade (Power for the Spade)*, 1969), and protest (*Black First, America Second*, 1970). What also emerges is Hammons' engagement with what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has designated the "speakerly text."¹ In the artist's works the language of African America becomes fleshed out in codes of the visual.

Injustice Case, 1970 (fig. 1) (purchased by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art the following year) is emblematic of Hammons' investment in the spoken word over the course of five decades. In this large-scale print we see the image of a man in profile, seated on a wooden chair. He is clothed and every inch of the fabric of his jeans, rubber-soled shoes, and work shirt is recorded in minute detail. His face is crowned by an Afro halo. Encircling the figure's ankles, wrists, thighs, torso, shoulders, neck, and mouth are lengths of material which bind him at times to his seat. His arms are fastened together behind him and the back of the chair. A taut line of tension moves from his straining wrists diagonally up to his face, which appears to jerk upwards. The cloth tying off his mouth seems to cover half his face as he struggles against his gag.

Injustice Case records an incident in the Chicago Conspiracy trial of the previous year. In that dispute the state of Illinois brought charges against eight defendants, accusing them of crossing

David Hammons, *Untitled*, 2014, glass mirror with wood and plaster frame, galvanized steel, 128½ × 52 × 10 inches (326.4 × 132.1 × 25.4 cm) (detail).



Fig. 1 David Hammons, *Injustice Case*, 1970, body print (margarine and powdered pigments) and American flag, sheet: 63 × 40½ inches (160.02 × 102.87 cm). Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum Acquisition Fund (M.71.7).

state lines to incite riot during the Democratic National Convention of 1968.² The trial began in late September 1969, and the defendants were popularly known as the Chicago Eight; however six weeks later that number was reduced to seven.

Bobby Seale, the only African American among the eight defendants, was the National Chairman of the Black Panther Party. While his attorneys were seeking an order to halt his removal to Chicago, he was spirited away by federal marshals and driven across country in shackles; no one knew of his whereabouts for a week until he surfaced at Chicago's infamous Cook County jail.³ Even before its start, Seale had tried to have the trial postponed because his lawyer had to be hospitalized. The unwilling judge neither permitted the case to be delayed nor allowed Seale to represent himself as he requested. Presiding Judge Hoffman finally did respond to Seale's repeated public condemnations in the courtroom and outcries against the denial of his constitutional rights. Over a four day period between October 29 and November 3, 1969, Hoffman had Seale gagged and bound in the courtroom.⁴

Although such restraint of unruly witnesses was allowed by law, there is no question that its use on an African American in the theater of justice called up vivid images of the country's heritage of slavery, and that system's legal *and* physical control of black human chattel; the looming

specter of lynching also floated close at hand.⁵ Though a federal judge had initially barred cameras and recording equipment from anywhere near the building housing the Conspiracy trial, that ruling was eventually modified.⁶ Yet, as striking as the image of Seale restrained must have been, it was not to be captured on photography or film, which were banned from the courtroom. An illustration by at least one commercial artist, however, did circulate in various publications.

The meticulous quality of Hammons' interpretation of this incident certainly owes much to the body print technique. And because of its ubiquity, Hammons was surely familiar with the published image. Yet there is another source that may have had an even greater impact on the artist. In 1970, the same year that *Injustice Case* was completed, Random House released Bobby Seale's book *Seize the Time*. In the chapter which covers the ordeal of the Chicago Conspiracy trial (titled "Chicago: Kidnapped, Chained, Tried, and Gagged") Seale spends several pages discussing exactly how he was restrained. The particulars are powerful given that some of the tapes were made right after the incident. The picture he draws is also incredibly detailed because he knew that the world at large had not been able to see him via the photographic or televised media.

After first having his mouth taped over and being shackled to a folding chair, yet continuing to comment on the proceedings through the "clanging" of metal against metal, Seale recounts that:

The next day they strapped me to a wooden armchair, put a lot of padding in front of my mouth and tied a big large rag around it. Another rag came up under my chin. The marshals tied a knot on top of my head. The rag came across my mouth and went around the back of my neck.⁷

Hammons' *Injustice Case* shows Seale tied up with cloth not constrained with handcuffs or leg irons. While it certainly had to have been easier to print fabric rather than metal using the body print method, the image nevertheless stays true to Seale's own account.

The phrase *Injustice Case* made it clear that in the mind of the artist this affair, and the predicament of African Americans at that time, was not about equity or justice but its lack. However, *Injustice Case* starts its life as part of larger assemblage. Parked in a museum-style glass case with a gavel, the body is effectively "In Justice's Case." But Hammons drops that pesky "'s" taking the power away from "justice" and through a grammatical mis—or rather—re-direction gives it back to the people and to the vernacular language of the street.

"Black Dialect," Geneva Smitherman has argued, springs from both a "linguistic-cultural African heritage" and its growth as a separate language formed under "conditions of servitude, oppression" and segregation.⁸ Under the exigencies of slavery African Americans developed two kinds of communication systems: one to deal with the master class and the forces of subjugation, the other to commune among themselves. This insider/outsider split continued into the modern and contemporary periods and cannot only be seen in recent debates around "ebonics" but in patterns of humor.

Writing on the African-American comedic tradition, Mel Watkins also identifies this same dual behavior, revealing forms focused outward for a larger (white) audience and those which remained directed specifically towards black communities. With this practice comes both a power and an agility to reverse meaning, to turn things (linguistically) to one's advantage. It is a legacy which over time has fostered "indirect wordplay and double-edged wit."⁹

Hammons' growing investment in black language also mirrored that of certain African-American poets of the 1960s and 1970s who became recognized under the banner of the Black Arts Movement.¹⁰ Intent on making poetry that was intellectually available in the broadest sense to the African-American masses, they incorporated the spoken sounds of black "slang" in their verse along with profanity, which was thought to reflect popular speech.

This trajectory has continued throughout Hammons' career. We see it, for instance, in *How Ya Like Me Now?* 1988, a billboard scale installation depicting Jesse Jackson. Created in context of his back-to-back presidential campaigns (1984, 1988), like any aspect of media strategy it seeks to capture voter imaginations and support. In this portrait Jackson is garbed patriotically, sporting a white shirt topped by a blue jacket and a red tie. But the black activist is also shown with white skin (along with blonde hair and eyes that pick up the hue of his coat), the work's title provocatively scrawled across his chest. Hammons' piece posed the question whether race, not platforms, policies or experience, predicted the political outcome. *How Ya Like Me Now?* was shown in Boston and New York throughout 1988 without incident. However, the following year in Washington D.C. the object was attacked as it was being installed outdoors as part of Richard J. Powell's exhibition "The Blues Aesthetic: Black Artists and Modernism" at the Washington Project for the Arts. Since then Hammons exhibits the piece with the sledgehammers that brought it down along with an American flag.¹¹

The title *How Ya Like Me Now?* comes from hip hop artist Kool Moe Dee's 1987 hit of the same name. A battle rap attesting to his facility with language or rhyming skills, Dee speaks of being the "only real mic-aroni" and tells us "rapping is an art and I'm like Picasso."¹² For Hammons such wordplay becomes a signifier of a larger black community and its traditions, an acknowledgment of vernacular culture whose sign is "the street."

It is no accident that an aspect of Hammons' *How Ya Like Me Now?* is rooted in a black music tradition. Kool Moe Dee's 1987 song samples the sounds of funk master James Brown but also boasts a riff from the bebop jazz classic *Salt Peanuts* written and made most famous by trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie. Hammons' obsession with music is constant and seen most notably in his perpetual return to jazz paradigms. For Hammons jazz musicians are sentinels of black avant-garde innovation, with the jazz master as at once transgressive and enigmatic. This sense of the black jazz heroic is also most often masculine.

Music historian Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr. writes about the gendered aspects of jazz in the 1940s, particularly bebop. He contends that on the road to becoming great art music, jazz found the need to "man up" in order to compete with things European. This is embodied in a demand for a certain aesthetic fierceness and found in the intellectual titles that musicians bestowed upon bebop songs (i.e. Charlie Parker's *Ornithology*, 1946). Bebop was, in Ramsey's words, a "patriarchal heroic performance space" for the unfurling of "virtuosic bravado."¹³ It was a place to perform black manhood, played out in musical battles where one honed and developed performative skills. It was a site of melodic improvisation and risk, but one where the traditional harmonics of standard songs would still remain recognizable.¹⁴ Jazz as the black heroic performative was also irrefutably modern.

One who is lyrically astute and victorious, particularly in a rap battle, is said to "drop the mic," departing and leaving nothing more to say. Hammons' feats—his facility with language, wordplay and punning—endure. In *Which Mike do you want to be like?* 2001, a collection of three vintage microphones conflates the shorthand term for the equipment (mic; a perpetual icon of hip hop culture) with its homonym, "Mike." These are the names of three men—Tyson, Jordan, and Jackson, athletes and musical superstars—who become representative of black communities, their cultural accomplishments as well as their transgressions. Here the interrogative format (as in *How Ya Like Me Now?*) also enlists participation, asking for a response, in the tradition of the parry of the rhyme, rap battle, or the dozens. This is language as a machine of the modern.

II. DRY EVERY TEAR

In a recent series of articles for *Artforum*, scholar Thierry de Duve seeks to drive home the overwhelming importance of Marcel Duchamp, and what his practice and legacy has meant for the history and making of contemporary art, what it authorized and permitted artists to do and be. Enter David Hammons, one of the artists in the 1960s who apparently received the missive sent by Duchamp earlier in the century. He certainly was at the right place at the right time: just outside Pasadena where the elder artist had his first retrospective in 1963; in Los Angeles where Dada had a foothold and Walter Hopps kept the fires burning.

Hammons and someone like Noah Purifoy, for instance, have at times celebrated such legacies. Purifoy exulted in Dada in the 1967 self-published zine *One To One, Quarterly Report on Aspects of Creativity*, and wrapped his practice in the language of its traditions. Hammons went initially for its descendants in his adaptation of Nouveau Realiste Yves Klein's body printing technique and an exploration of Pop in the oeuvre of Jim Dine. As Hammons once intoned,

I was trying to figure out why black people were called spades as opposed to clubs. Because I remember being called a spade once, and I didn't know what it meant; nigger I knew but spade I still don't. So, I just took the shape, and started painting it. I started dealing with the spade the way Jim Dine was using the heart. . . then I started getting shovels and made masks out of them. It was just like a chain reaction . . .¹⁵

While Dine's work could be found in 1960s L.A., Hammons' extensive thinking about it may have come from his encounter with the artist's retrospective at the Whitney Museum in 1970, while taking in Mel Edwards' influential show there.¹⁶ The hearts that were so suggestive to Hammons were on view. These were not the combines that defined Dine's heart motifs of the early 1970s and 1980s but more clearly transitional works, assemblages of straw (*Nancy and I at Ithaca (Straw Heart)*, 1966–69), chicken wire, refuse, and power tools with snaking cords (*Five Chicken Wire Hearts (James Peto)*, 1969), along with a series of watercolors. Created at a time when he was painting less, in these pieces Dine seemed to reach back to assemblage and to consider materials in a manner more aligned with process art and postminimalism. Other pieces may have turned Hammons' head as well, including a group from 1962 with a "black" theme, *Black Garden Tools*, *Black Saw*, *Black Tools in a Landscape* and *A Black Shovel, Number 2* (fig. 2) created in what emerged as Dine's signature: painted items affixed to painted canvases. *Black Garden Tools* featured two spades; from the same year there was also *Shovel*. One is struck by the spareness of Dine's early projects represented in the

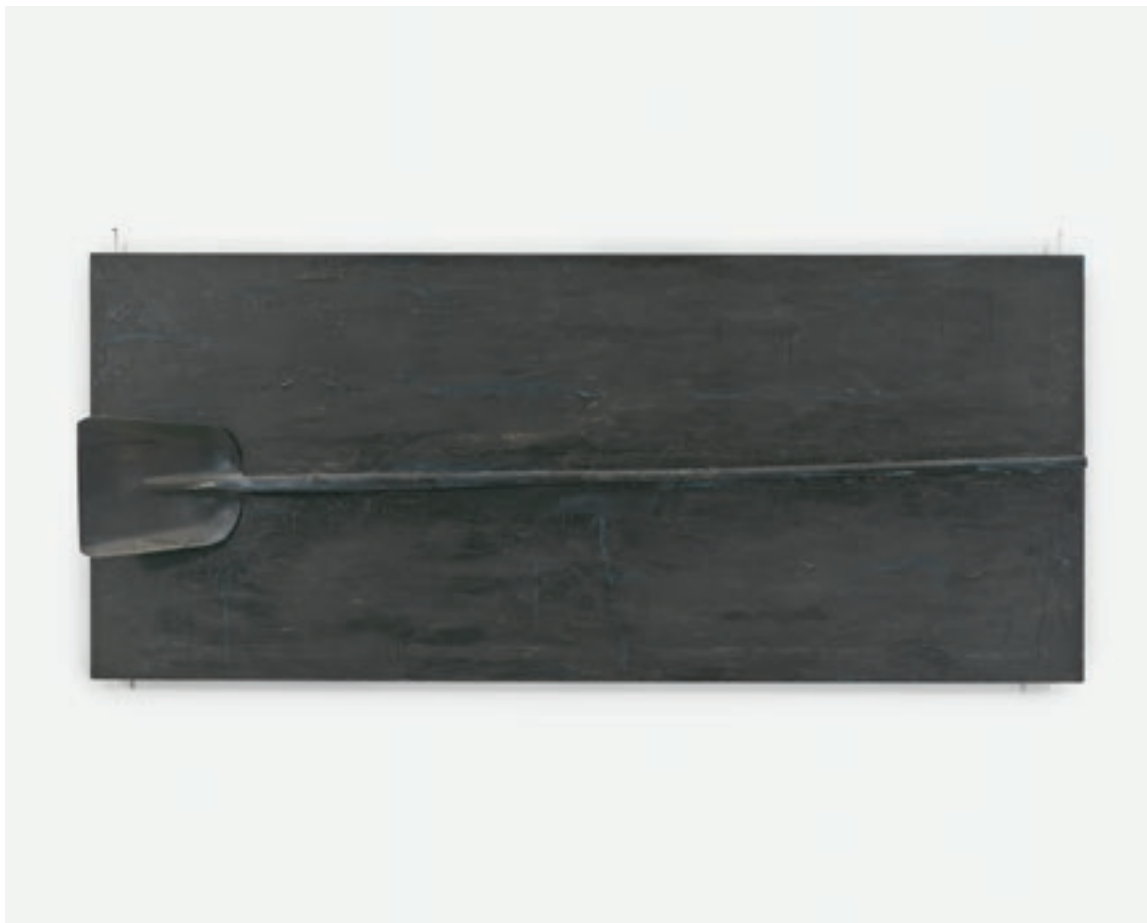


Fig. 2 Jim Dine, *A Black Shovel, Number 2*, 1962, oil and shovel on canvas, 36 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 84 $\frac{7}{16}$ × 7 $\frac{5}{16}$ inches (92.4 × 214.5 × 19.4 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Bernard Brodsky 67.63.

retrospective—paint, canvas, tool, title— felt even in the installations. For all their autobiographical sheen (or perhaps because of it) they exude a sense of muteness, indecisiveness, and search.¹⁷

And then there is language, “word and image interchanges,” which Robert Pincus-Witten sees as Dine’s debt to Jasper Johns.¹⁸ If many critics have seen an ode to Duchamp in Hammons’ visual mischief and take on language, it perhaps also comes through neo-Dada running from Johns to Dine. In Hammons’ relationship to traditions of the western avant-garde, however, we see something else as well. There is a confrontation with Dine: the language volley becomes a parry. You want to see a black shovel? A black shovel is a spade. There is a turn to the rich semantics of African diasporic communities, one which Richard J. Powell has recognized as an art that is both “commentary” and “oath-taking.”¹⁹

If Hammons and Purifoy did claim legacies of western modernist artmaking, did they do so to empower a different linguistic or perhaps neologistic past? Was it a way to at once privilege the Black South and its inheritance in Hammons’ precious formation of “the street”? These are places where, as Grey Gundaker and Judith McWillie have argued, “things [are] thoughts,”²⁰ and where the most bedraggled bit of everyday life, seemingly nonsensical, is posted as sign, as protection, as a point of meaning. Where to misread is to redirect. Where language, seemingly simple, commonplace, seemingly ungrammatical and anti-intellectual, is spot on. And it inherits a longer and larger custom in which the Black South is bequeathed (and remixes) such gestures and traditions from West and



Fig. 3 David Hammons, *The Holy Bible: Old Testament*, 2002, installed in the exhibition, “Contemporary Galleries: 1980–Now,” The Museum of Modern Art, New York, November 16, 2011–February 9, 2014.

Central Africa. Such signs open onto and invoke the metaphysical. “Can’t go by what you see,” sings gospel artist Twinkie Clark, “So dry every tear from your eye. There is a word . . .” that will deliver the force of your destiny.²¹

Yet Hammons engages Africa and its aesthetic conventions in another register as well, through what scholar Manthia Diawara sees as a “banalization” of African objects.²² It is an encounter with these traditions on the level of the quotidian, the routine, the popular and not particularly the epic. We see this in works such as *Standing Room Only*, 1996 in which a taxidermied cat is curled up on Ghanaian peg or Djembe drum. *Untitled*, 1996 from the same year presents a stack of masks from an array of West and Central African civilizations, most likely purchased on the streets of New York City or at a flea market. Curving delicately outward from the wall this assemblage is topped by a small hand mirror, rendering it a single, multinational, Nkisi. Hailing from the Democratic Republic of Congo the traditional Nkisi is activated by language where puns have medicinal and spiritual force, their power driven home with nails to secure an oath.²³ It most often takes the form of the human body with punning materials of authority sited in a central cavity behind a reflective surface. However, it also appears as a Janus-headed dog. In *Orange is the New Black*, 2014 Hammons lacquers this element with bright paint the color of jailhouse uniforms, its embedded nails and flashing mirror still visible.



Fig. 4 Marcel Duchamp, *Fresh Widow*, 1920/1964, painted wood, leather, 31 × 21 × 4 inches (79.2 × 53.2 × 10.3 cm). Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

This is the same Hammons, however, who gives us *The Holy Bible: Old Testament*, 2002 (fig. 3)—Duchamp's catalogue raisonné wrapped in the worn leather covers of prayer and on an altar to boot; an apparent warning not to worship the western modernist covenant. He has also styled himself, at times, as the “C.E.O. of the Duchamp Outpatient Clinic” which vaccinates people against artworld clichés.²⁴ But when we compare pieces such as Hammons *The Door (Admissions Office)*, 1969 with Duchamp's *Fresh Widow*, 1920/1964 (fig. 4) in both composition and the mobilization of language, we can't help wondering, “misdirection or redirection?”

In his review of David Hammons' 2011 exhibition at L&M Arts, Alexander Alberro thinks about art as both “an analogy to a joke” and a “solution to the initially unintelligible;” art introduces that which cannot be said and what is occluded in public speech or polite conversation.²⁵ This is the action performed by Hammons' tarp paintings: collapsing the usual histories of painting with those of “banal factory made materials” which overlay and obscure while also meshing with the underlying canvases.²⁶ In these objects the stories of worn and abject commodities and those of contemporary art are one. Constructed paintings such as *Untitled*, 2008–14 and *Untitled*, 2015 remain upright and wallbound yet continue to kiss the floor, tipping us off to these proximate narratives.²⁷ They are also Hammons' way into painting, begun with the dense flourishes of the “hotel-style” enamel on Masonite of *Untitled*, ca. 1969, continued decades later in the equally

saturated yet washy embellishments of *Untitled (Kool-Aid)*, 2006. The tarps are in one sense protective of the painted image, their obfuscation leaving work for the mind's eye and our own speculative thoughts. Hammons' conscious layering is also interrogative: what do these apparently disparate materials of our environment have to say about our lives on this planet? The mobilization of unexceptional materials also imbricates the bodies that produced them, or even further, as Rizvana Bradley argues, speaks to the exigencies of the flesh, bare life.²⁸

The wide splashy brush strokes and loud colors of the tarp paintings, as Alberro points out, access a legacy of the New York School (particularly the example of Willem de Kooning, a stalwart of L&M Arts) but also erase and stand in for the same. Indeed, in *Untitled*, 2008–14 and *Untitled*, 2015 the literal earth tones of ground-in dirt along with painted corals, turquoise, black and silver present themselves (to this viewer at least) as homages to a lesser-known figure of the era, New Orleans-born painter, Edward Clark. This same palette goes horizontal and three-dimensional, both constructed and deconstructed, in *A Movable Object*, 2012, where the blasting orange of a home construction supply store cart is loaded with chunks of glistening black asphalt interspersed with luxurious skeins of organza the colors of the ocean.

After Hammons and Ralph Ellison we are reminded that all paintings, or art for that matter, are "tricksters and confidence men."²⁹ Audre Lorde continues this thought, beginning her poem *Good Mirrors Are Not Cheap* just so,

It is a waste of time hating a mirror
or its reflection
instead of stopping the hand
that makes glass with distortions

Lorde's reminder to shift our perception away from things that demean us, runs through an article by Lowery Stokes Sims on the circumscribed categories for works of artists who are neither white nor male. Using the writing of Jacques Lacan as a flash point, she invokes the image of distorted artworld mirrors that constrict what or whom is esthetically pleasing and thus reflected. Such action is determined by broader social mirroring that not only suppresses, but rallies hateful propaganda, rendering certain peoples (and artists) deficient; it is the trauma, according to Ellison, of being "reduced to a negative sign that usually appears in a comedy of the grotesque and the unacceptable."³⁰

David Hammons' journey has nimbly challenged such equations. In themes of beauty and athletic prowess—hair and basketball—Hammons has played with signs often manipulated as stereotype. Hammons' hair pieces date back to the seventies from site works in Los Angeles to shows in New York at Just Above Midtown Gallery. The later works seen in “David Hammons: Five Decades” are monumental, such as the artificial, wig-like, *Rubber Dread*, 1989. In the Whitney Museum's exquisite *Untitled*, 1992, perhaps Hammons' ultimate statement using human hair, its garbage-strewn tendrils appear as the definitive bad object. But we are left to wonder, is its copious expanse a warning to keep us at arm's length, or are its fecund strands meant to draw us closer? The excess of these pieces is contrasted with *Untitled*, 2004, a large rock whose close-shaven surface sports sinuous decorative lines, a homage to barbershop style *and* minimalist painting. Hammons' perpetual return to the trope of the black athlete is found in the backboard articulated in bottle caps of *Untitled*, 1987, a street smart hoop-cum-chandelier (*Basketball Chandelier*, 1997), and *Traveling*, 2002, where the dirt of the steady and skilled dribbling ball creates the composition and palette of a drawing. It is literally propped up by a worn suitcase, giving the piece one logic for its title, which is also a term for a baller's patently illegal move.

Musing on his 1966 collaborative exhibition of assemblage or junk art, “66 Signs of Neon,” one commemorating L.A.'s Watts Rebellion, Noah Purifoy described his goal as communicating the human potential of Watts to the neighborhood itself as well as the world:

Its purpose was to reflect the August 11 event on a symbolic level and to demonstrate to the community an existing fact: If the community of Watts found itself in the midst of something—something like junk—value could be placed on it to far exceed the few cents paid at the junk stores on Monday morning.³¹

A decade later David Hammons would build on this, offering another scenario for the context of cast off materials:

no one will buy...outrageous art...it will make people think, think about themselves and what that means. You can't sell this...they won't buy this...old dirty bags, grease, bones, hair...it's about us, it's about me...it isn't negative...we should look at these images and see how positive they are, how strong, how powerful...our hair is positive...it's powerful, look what it can do. There's nothing negative about our images, it all depends on who is seeing it and we've been depending on someone else's sight...We need to look again and decide.³²

Audre Lorde ends her poem thus,

Because at the same time
down the street
a glassmaker is grinning
turning out new mirrors that lie
Selling us
new clowns
at cut rate.

In the last year Hammons has created a series of mirrors where an overlay of junky materials obscures the reflective surface. Related to the occlusions of the tarp paintings, they ask us to “look again and decide” what constitutes the discarded/image. Using a palette similar to the canvases, the crumbling ornate and gilded flourishes of the assemblages bespeak the failures of classical norms. Yet, as Ellison remarks, artists choose their inspirations from everywhere, “his form is his greatest freedom and his insights are where he finds them.”³³

Through his designation of “the street” Hammons offers a framework of both participation and power. The mobilization of potential is initiated by a change of perception. His ambivalent address sketches the outline of the dream, where freedom is first imagined. It is the site of the otherworldly, brought into view by artists’ and onlookers’ active collaboration at making things evident. As Alberro prompts us, “For Hammons, art is a mischievous game beyond limits. It perverts the logic of forms of belief, conventions of knowledge, and ways of seeing, to make the repressed visible in a manner that only an excellent joke could accomplish.”³⁴ Hammons himself continually reminds us of the same, today embedded in the title of the sculpture, *Orange is the New Black*, a gloss on pop culture which nonetheless comments on the ongoing exigencies of black life.

With special thanks to David Hammons for his generosity. And to Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr. and C. Ian White for listening.

Notes

1. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey, A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
2. The defendants included David Dellinger, Rennie Davis, Tom Hayden, Jerry Rubin, Abbie Hoffman, John Froines, Lee Weiner, and Bobby Seale.
3. "U.S. Marshals Move Seale From Coast As Lawyers Appeal," *The New York Times* 13 September 1969: 24, and "Seale in Chicago Jail," *The New York Times* 19 September 1969: 38. See also Bobby Seale, *Seize The Time* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991; originally Random House 1970).
4. J. Anthony Lukas, "Seale Put in Chains At Chicago 8 Trial," *The New York Times* 30 October 1969: 1, 39, and J. Anthony Lukas, "Seale Found in Contempt, Sentenced to Four Years," *The New York Times* 6 November 1969: 1, 54.
5. J. Anthony Lukas, "Seale Put in Chains At Chicago 8 Trial," *The New York Times* 30 October 1969: 39, and Fred P. Graham, "High Court Backs Gagging to Curb Trial Disorders," *The New York Times* 1 April 1970: 1, 19.
6. "Press Curbs Set at Trial of 8 Protesters in Chicago," *The New York Times* 18 September 1969: 44, and "U.S. Judge in Chicago Modifies Press Ban," *The New York Times* 19 September 1969: 26.
7. Seale: 338–339.
8. Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin, The Language of Black America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986; originally Houghton Mifflin 1977): 2.
9. Mel Watkins, *On the Real Side: Laughing Lying and Signifying, The Underground Tradition of African American Humor* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994): 36.
10. Poets of the Black Arts Movement included Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Haki Madhubuti, and Nikki Giovanni among others. See Geneva Smitherman, "The Power of Rap: The Black Idiom and The New Black Poetry," *Twentieth Century Literature* 19 (1973): 259–274.
11. I showed Hammons' *How Ya Like Me Now?* in the exhibition "Trading Places: An Arts Exchange Exhibition" at the Artists Foundation Boston (Apr.19–May 21, 1988); it later traveled to Jamaica Arts Center in Queens, NY (Aug.5–Sept.17, 1988).
12. Kool Moe Dee, *How Ya Like Me Now?* 1987 was a battle rap against LL Cool J who Dee accused of stealing his lyrical style.
13. Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., *The Amazing Bud Powell, Black Genius, Jazz History, and the Challenge of Bebop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 121, 122.
14. Ramsey, 181.
15. David Hammons interviewed by Kellie Jones, *Real Life Magazine* No. 16 (Autumn 1986): 4.
16. "Melvin Edwards: Works" appeared from March 2–29, 1970 and the Jim Dine survey ran from February 27–April 19, 1970, at the Whitney Museum of American Art.
17. David Shapiro, "Jim Dine's Life-In-Progress," *Art News* 69 (1) (March 1970): 42–46. Graham W.J. Beal, *Jim Dine: Five Themes* (Minneapolis and New York: Walker Art Center and Abbeville Press, 1984).
18. Robert Pincus-Witten, "Jim Dine," *Artforum* 8 (9) (May 1970), 74–75. However, in considering another piece from that era, *Black Bathroom #2*, 1962, one intuitively a commentary, while subtle, on the battle against segregation and inequity in the U.S.. See Kellie Jones, "Civil/Rights/Act," in Teresa A. Carbone and Kellie Jones, eds. *Witness, Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties* (Brooklyn Museum and The Monacelli Press: 2014), 11–55, 162–163.
19. Richard J. Powell, "African American Postmodernism and David Hammons: Body and Soul," in David C. Driskell, ed. *African American Visual Aesthetics, A Postmodernist View* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995): 133.
20. Grey Gundaker and Judith McWillie, *No Space Hidden, The Spirit of African American Yard Work* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005): 51.
21. Twinkie Clark, "There is a Word (Dry Every Tear)," *Live and Unplugged* (2013).
22. Manthia Diawara, "Make it Funky: the art of David Hammons," *Artforum* 36 (9) (May 1998): 120–127.
23. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983).
24. Peter Schjeldahl, "The Walker," *The New Yorker* 23 December 2002.
25. Alexander Alberro, "The Joke of Painting," *Texte Zur Kunst* 82 (June 2011), 233.
26. Alberro, 234.
27. This wall-to-floor axis is also mobilized by Senga Nengudi (a friend of Hammons' since their days L.A.) in her RSVP works. See Kellie Jones, "Beyond Reverie" in *Senga Nengudi, Alt* (London: White Cube, 2014), 31–34.
28. Rizvana Bradley, "Transferred Flesh, Reflections on Senga Nengudi's RSVP," *TDR: The Drama Review* 59 (1) (Spring 2015), 161–166.
29. Ralph Ellison, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," in *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972) [essay originally 1958], 46.
30. Ellison, 48. Lowery Stokes Sims, "The Mirror, The Other, the Politics of Esthetics," *Artforum* 28 (March 1990), 111–115. Jacques Lacan, "The mirror state as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience," *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 1–7. Audre Lorde, "Good Mirrors Are Not Cheap" (1970), *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 67. The current essay is inspired, in part, by Thelma Golden's 1992 exhibition of Glenn Ligon banners in dialogue with Lorde's poem, "Good Mirrors Are Not Cheap," July 17–November 28, 1992, Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris. See also Glenn Ligon, "Notes on a Performance by Kellie Jones," *Triple Canopy* (Aug. 6, 2015). The correct title of my performance/lecture was "'There is a word': Absence, Presence, and David Hammons," Museum of Modern Art, Value Talks, curated by Ralph Lemon, March 14, 2014.
31. Noah Purifoy, "'66' Philosophy: Seeing Old Things in New Ways," *One To One, Quarterly Report on Aspects of Creativity* (January–March 1967): 3. Noah Purifoy papers, 1935–1998, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. The Watts Rebellion began on August 11, 1965.
32. David Hammons from a discussion during August–September 1977 in Linda Goode Bryant and Marcy S. Philips, *Contextures* (New York: Just Above Midtown Gallery, 1978): 41.
33. Ellison, 59.
34. Alberro, 236.



WORKS
1969–2015

Spade (Power for the Spade), 1969

body print and silkscreen

51 ½ × 33 ½ inches (130.8 × 85.1 cm)

Tilton Family Collection



The Door (Admissions Office), 1969

wood, acrylic sheet, and pigment construction

79 × 48 × 15 inches (200.7 × 121.9 × 38.1 cm)

Collection of Friends, the Foundation of the California African American Museum

**ADMISSIONS
OFFICE**



Untitled, ca. 1969

enamel on masonite

40 × 30 inches (101.6 × 76.2 cm)

Collection of Maurice Marciano, Los Angeles



Untitled, ca. 1969

body print

60 ³/₄ × 40 ³/₄ inches (154.3 × 103.5 cm)

Private collection



Untitled (The Kiss), 1970
body print
60 × 40 inches (152.4 × 101.6 cm)
Glenstone



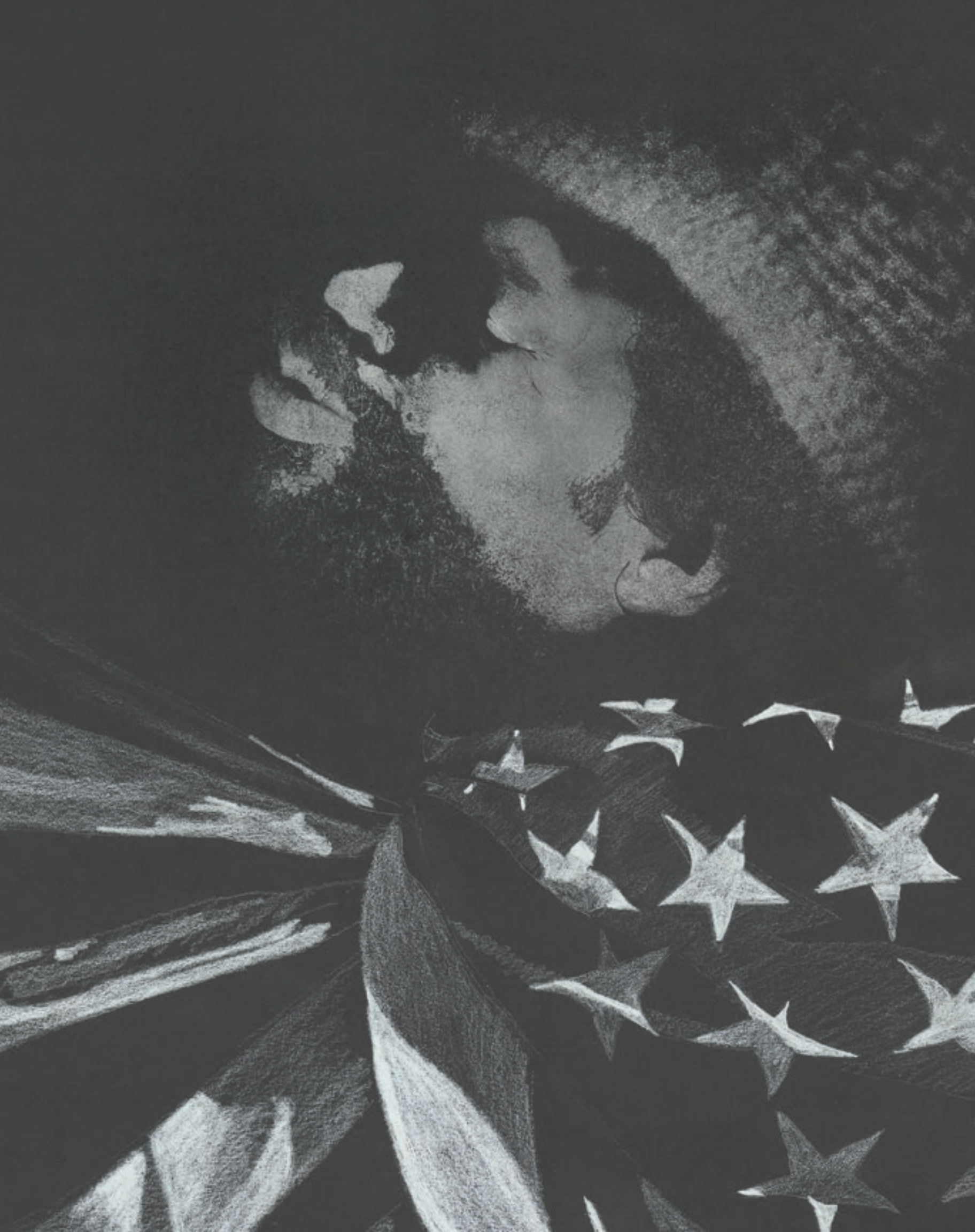
Untitled (Man with Flag), undated

body print

35 × 42 inches (89 × 106.6 cm)

Glenstone





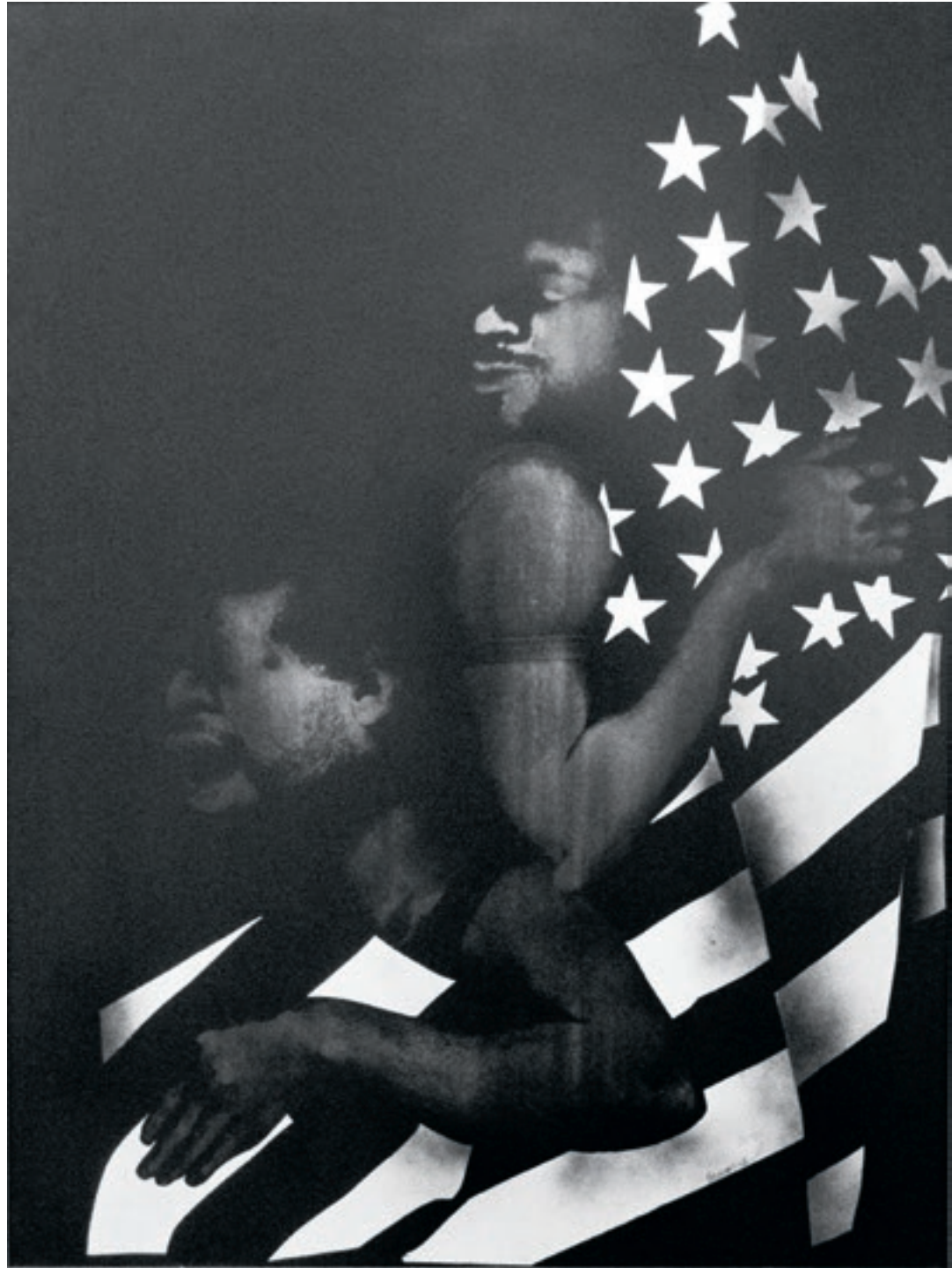


Black First, America Second, 1970

body print on paper

41 ¼ × 31 ¼ inches (104.8 × 79.4 cm)

Tilton Family Collection



Sexy Sue, 1970

body print on illustration board

60 × 40 inches (152.4 × 101.6 cm)

Collection Glenn and Amanda Fuhrman, NY,

Courtesy the FLAG Art Foundation



Untitled (Body Print), 1975

mixed media on paper

39 × 29 inches (99.1 × 73.7 cm)

Private collection



Untitled, 1987

wood, wire, rubber balls and bottle caps

93 × 48 × 17½ inches (236.2 × 122 × 44.4 cm)

Glenstone







How Ya Like Me Now?, 1988

tin, plywood, sledgehammers, Lucky Strike
cigarette wrapper, and American flag
158 × 222 × 48 inches (401.4 × 563.8 × 122 cm)
Glenstone





Champ, 1989

rubber inner tube and boxing gloves

66 × 19 × 27 inches (167.6 × 48.3 × 68.6 cm)

Collection Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego;

Museum purchase with funds from the Awards

in the Visual Arts program, 1989.3



Rubber Dread, 1989

rubber bicycle inner tubes, found metal stand, and red rubber ball

51 ¾ × 21 × 20 inches (131.4 × 53.3 × 50.8 cm)

Private collection, New York, courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London



Untitled, 1989

glass and silicone glue

37¼ × 37½ × 7¾ inches (94.6 × 95.1 × 19.5 cm)

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution;

Joseph H. Hirshhorn Purchase Fund, 1990



Bird, 1990

painting metal, wire, basketball and feathers

73 × 23 × 14 inches (185.4 × 58.4 × 35.6 cm)

Private collection







Smoke Screen, 1990-95

iron, curtain, wire, and cigarettes

105 × 58 × 26½ inches (266.7 × 147.32 × 67.31 cm)

Pinault Collection



Untitled, 1992

human hair, wire, metallic mylar, sledge hammer,
plastic beads, string, metal food tin, panty hose,
leather, tea bags, and feathers
dimensions variable

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;
purchase, with funds from the Mrs. Percy Uris Bequest
and the Painting and Sculpture Committee 92.128a z





In the Hood, 1993

athletic sweatshirt hood with wire

23 × 10 × 5 inches (58.4 × 25.4 × 12.7 cm)

Tilton Family Collection



Fly Jar, 1996

glass, wood, metal zipper sliders, metal mesh,
metal wire and rod, plastic handle, leaves and soil
18 ¼ × 17 ¼ × 14 inches (46.4 × 43.8 × 35.6 cm)

Private collection, New York



Standing Room Only, 1996

taxidermied cat on wooden drum

31 ⁵/₈ × 15 ³/₄ × 15 ³/₄ inches (80.3 × 40 × 40 cm)

Private collection



Untitled, 1996

African masks, mirror and wire

56 × 9 × 27½ inches (142.2 × 22.9 × 69.9 cm)

Private collection







Basketball Chandelier, 1997

mixed media

162 × 61 × 20 inches (411.5 × 154.9 × 50.8 cm)

Private collection







One Stone Head, 1997

stone, hair, and hat

13 × 13 × 13 inches (33 × 33 × 33 cm)

Private collection



Throwing Up a Brick, 1998

dirt on paper, with three bricks

framed drawing: 120³/₄ × 49¹/₂ inches (306.7 × 125.7 cm)

overall: 129¹/₄ × 49¹/₂ × 9 inches (328.3 × 125.7 × 22.9 cm)

Private collection



Which Mike do you want to be like...?, 2001

electric microphones, metal stands, and electrical cords

dimensions variable

Private collection



Traveling, 2002

Harlem earth on paper, with black cloth suitcase

framed drawing: 116 $\frac{1}{8}$ \times 49 \times 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (295 \times 124.5 \times 45.1 cm)

suitcase: 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ \times 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ \times 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (64.9 \times 46.4 \times 10.8 cm)

Private collection



Untitled, 2004

rock and hair

12 × 9 × 5¼ inches (30.5 × 22.9 × 13.3 cm)

The Frank Cohen Collection







Untitled (Kool-Aid), 2006

Kool-Aid on paper with silk curtain and terry-cloth frame

43 ½ × 29 ½ inches (110.5 × 74.9 cm)

Private collection



Untitled, 2008–14

acrylic on canvas, plastic netting

canvas size: 80 × 70 inches (203.2 × 177.8 cm)

Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery



Untitled, 2010

acrylic on canvas, tarp

canvas size: 92 × 71 inches (233.7 × 180.3 cm)

Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery







A Movable Object, 2012

steel, asphalt, and fabric

42½ × 66 × 38 inches (108 × 167.6 × 96.5 cm)

Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery





Untitled, 2013

glass mirror with wood and plaster frame, fabric
75½ × 38 × 11½ inches (191.8 × 96.5 × 29.2 cm)

Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery







Orange Is The New Black, 2014
glass, wood, nails, and acrylic
25 × 16 × 13 inches (63.5 × 40.6 × 33 cm)
Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery







Untitled, 2014

glass mirror with wood and plaster frame, galvanized steel

128½ × 52 × 10 inches (326.4 × 132.1 × 25.4 cm)

Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery



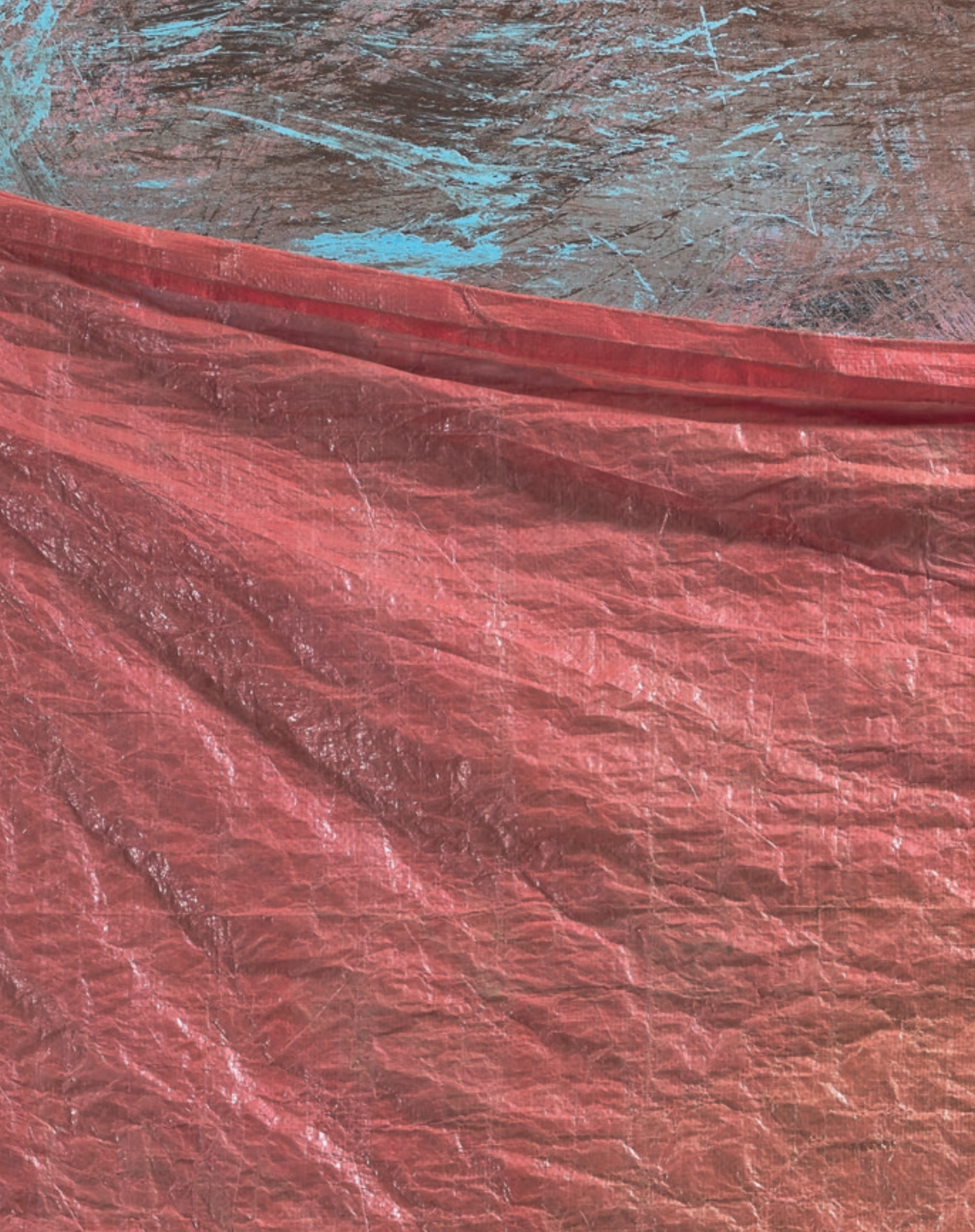
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acrylic on canvas, tarp

canvas size: 80 × 70 inches (203.2 × 177.8 cm)

Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery







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Purchase Fund, 1990
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Bird, 1990

painted metal, wire, basketball and feathers
73 × 23 × 14 inches (185.4 × 58.4 × 35.6 cm)
Private collection
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Smoke Screen, 1990–95

iron, curtain, wire, and cigarettes
105 × 58 × 26½ inches (266.7 × 147.32 × 67.31 cm)
Pinault Collection
Page 66

Untitled, 1992

human hair, wire, metallic mylar, sledge hammer,
plastic beads, string, metal food tin, panty hose,
leather, tea bags, and feathers
dimensions variable
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase,
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athletic sweatshirt hood with wire
 23 × 10 × 5 inches (58.4 × 25.4 × 12.7 cm)
 Tilton Family Collection
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Fly Jar, 1996

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 18 ¼ × 17 ¼ × 14 inches (46.4 × 43.8 × 35.6 cm)
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 13 × 13 × 13 inches (33 × 33 × 33 cm)
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dirt on paper, with three bricks
 framed drawing: 120 ¾ × 49 ½ inches (306.7 × 125.7 cm)
 overall: 129 ¼ × 49 ½ × 9 inches (328.3 × 125.7 × 22.9 cm)
 Private collection
 Page 86

Which Mike do you want to be like...?, 2001

electric microphones, metal stands, and electrical cords
 dimensions variable
 Private collection
 Page 88

Traveling, 2002

Harlem earth on paper, with black cloth suitcase
 framed drawing: 116 ⅞ × 49 × 17 ¾ inches
 (295 × 124.5 × 45.1 cm)
 suitcase: 25 ½ × 18 ¼ × 4 ¼ inches
 (64.9 × 46.4 × 10.8 cm)
 Private collection
 Page 90

Untitled, 2004

rock and hair
 12 × 9 × 5 ¼ inches (30.5 × 22.9 × 13.3 cm)
 The Frank Cohen Collection
 Page 92

Untitled (Kool-Aid), 2006

Kool-Aid on paper with silk curtain and
 terry-cloth frame
 43 ½ × 29 ½ inches (110.5 × 74.9 cm)
 Private collection
 Page 96

Untitled, 2008–14

acrylic on canvas, plastic netting
 canvas size: 80 × 70 inches (203.2 × 177.8 cm)
 Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery
 Page 98

Untitled, 2010

acrylic on canvas, tarp
 canvas size: 92 × 71 inches (233.7 × 180.3 cm)
 Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery
 Page 100

A Movable Object, 2012

steel, asphalt, and fabric
 42 ½ × 66 × 38 inches (108 × 167.6 × 96.5 cm)
 Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery
 Page 104

Untitled, 2013

glass mirror with wood and plaster frame, fabric
 75 ½ × 38 × 11 ½ inches (191.8 × 96.5 × 29.2 cm)
 Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery
 Page 106

Orange Is The New Black, 2014

glass, wood, nails, and acrylic
 25 × 16 × 13 inches (63.5 × 40.6 × 33 cm)
 Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery
 Page 110

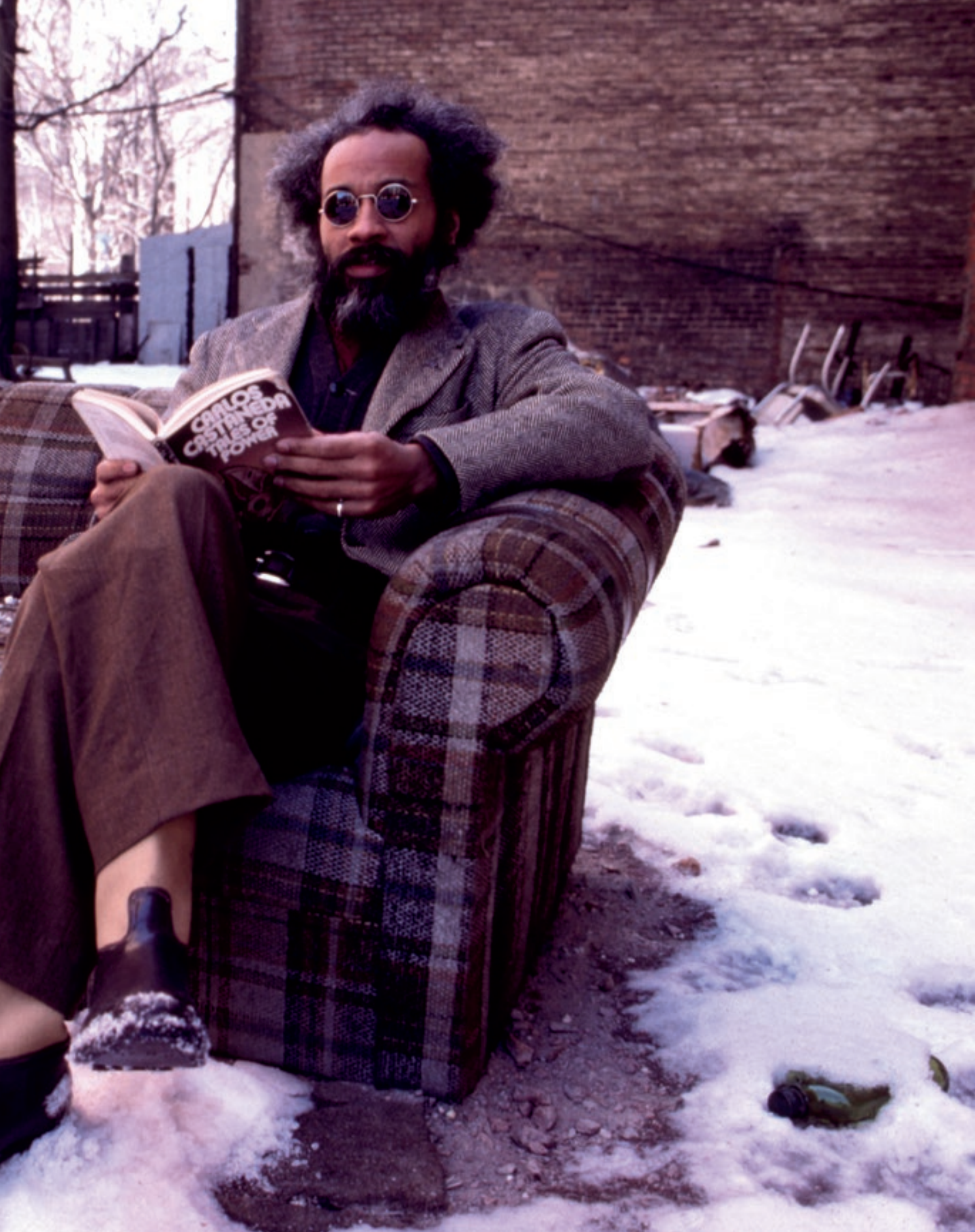
Untitled, 2014

glass mirror with wood and plaster frame,
 galvanized steel
 128 ½ × 52 × 10 inches (326.4 × 132.1 × 25.4 cm)
 Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery
 Page 114

Untitled, 2015

acrylic on canvas, tarp
 canvas size: 80 × 70 inches (203.2 × 177.8 cm)
 Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery
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CHRONOLOGY



David Hammons making body prints in his Slauson Avenue studio, Los Angeles, 1974.

1943

David Hammons is born in Springfield, Illinois, the youngest of 10 children.

1963

Leaves Springfield for Los Angeles at the age of twenty. He attends Los Angeles City College, then studies advertising at Los Angeles Trade Technical College while taking evening classes at Otis Art Institute. He continues on to Chouinard Art Institute (which later becomes CalArts), studying under draughtsman and printer Charles White.

1968

Begins making body prints. His breakout body of work, the body prints pair life-sized depictions of his own face and figure—created by coating his skin and hair with margarine, pressing his greased body onto paper, then covering the imprint with pigment powder—with politically charged symbols, such as the American flag. He continues this series through the early 1970s.

1970

Participates in his first group shows, at the La Jolla Museum of Art; the Oakland Museum; the Fine Arts Gallery, San Diego; the California State University, Los Angeles; and the Brockman Gallery, Los Angeles.

1971

Hammons has his first solo exhibition, at the Brockman Gallery, Los Angeles, which represents him. Founded by the young artists and brothers Alonzo and Dale Davis, Brockman Gallery (1967–1990) is a commercial gallery dedicated primarily to the work of African-American artists. This same year, Hammons participates in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's "Three Graphic Artists: Charles White, David Hammons, Timothy Washington," which travels to the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. LACMA acquires his body print, *Injustice Case*, 1970.

c. 1971–1974

Executes the Spade series. It is in this body of work that Hammons begins exploring assemblage sculptures and performances, eventually moving away entirely from body prints and a two-dimensional, framed format.

David Hammons, *Higher Goals*, 1986, mixed media, 5 units ranging from 20–30 feet in height. Commissioned by the Public Art Fund for exhibition in Cadman Plaza Park, Brooklyn, April 10, 1986–March 27, 1987.



David Hammons in collaboration with Angela Valeria and Jerry Barr, *Delta Spirit House*, 1985.
Commissioned by Creative Time for the exhibition "Art on the Beach 7" in Battery Park.

1974

Begins spending most of his time in New York, where he makes sculpture on the streets and in the vacant lots of Harlem, using discarded materials found in the neighborhood. He is the subject of a solo exhibition at California State University, Los Angeles, "David Hammons: Selected Works 1968-1974."

1975

Hammons has his first solo exhibition in New York, "Greasy Bags and Barbeque Bones," at Just Above Midtown Gallery. The exhibition demonstrates his recent shift into three-dimensional assemblage, presenting a series of works made from brown paper bags, grease, hair and barbeque bones. He also participates in a group exhibition at Just Above Midtown Gallery. Run by founder/director Linda Goode Bryant from 1974-1988 and located on 57th Street, JAM is the first gallery in a major gallery district to promote the work of African-American artists; though begun as a commercial venture, it eventually evolves into a non-profit artist space.

1976

Second solo exhibition at Just Above Midtown Gallery, "David Hammons: Dreadlock Series."

1977

Third solo exhibition, an untitled show including hair works, at Just Above Midtown Gallery. Hammons is also the subject of a solo exhibition at the Neighborhood Art Center in Atlanta, Georgia, entitled "Nap Tapestry: Wire and Wiry Hair."

1980

Named Artist-in-Residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem. For "Rented Earth," his solo exhibition at the New Museum, New York, he creates a mud hut interior with African masks and ritual staffs juxtaposed with a toy television set in what the museum calls an exploration of "the diametrically opposed relationship between spirituality and technology." He creates a hair installation for the group exhibition "Afro-American Abstraction" at P.S. 1, in which he appears alongside Melvin Edwards, Senga Nengudi, Martin Puryear, and Jack Whitten, among others. Contributes a work of broken glass bottles to the "Times Square Show," the landmark group exhibition organized by Colab in an abandoned massage parlor on 41st Street and Seventh Avenue. The Atlanta International Airport commissions his sculpture *Flight Fantasies*, from a series of works incorporating hair and pieces of broken record albums.

1981

Executes two performances engaging with Richard Serra's monumental steel sculpture, *T.W.U.*, 1980, installed on the corner of Franklin Street in downtown Manhattan. In *Pissed Off*, Hammons urinates on the sculpture, and in *Shoe Tree*, he throws 25 pairs of sneakers on top of it. Both performances are documented by photographer Dawoud Bey.

1982

Awarded National Endowment for the Arts grant. Performs *Human Pegs/Pole Dreams*, in which he introduces the basketball theme that he will continue to explore for the next three decades.



David Hammons with *Higher Goals*, 1986, mixed media, 5 units ranging 20'–35' in height.

1983

Creates his first *Higher Goals* sculpture, a 52-foot high basketball hoop wrapped in a mosaic of found bottle caps and installed in a vacant lot on 125th Street in Harlem. Performs *Bliz-aard Ball Sale*, in which, at various points over the winter, he sells snowballs beside other street vendors on Cooper Square in the East Village.

1984

Awarded a Guggenheim grant.

1985

Participates in Creative Time's "Art on the Beach" project in Battery Park with *Delta Spirit House*. Inspired by African-American architecture of the South as well as Simon Rhodia's *Watts Towers*, the shanty-like structure is built from lumber and other materials Hammons had found in Harlem. Intended by Creative Time to be a temporary, site-specific work, Hammons declines to disassemble the piece and it remains in Battery Park until it is ultimately vandalized.

1986

The Public Art Fund commissions Hammons to create a version of his *Higher Goals* sculpture in Cadman Plaza Park, which faces the court buildings in downtown Brooklyn. For this iteration, he executes 5, 20–30 foot high hoops from telephone poles topped with basketball hoops and covered in beer bottle caps (p. 124).

1987

Awarded a New York Foundation for the Arts grant. His installation *Tree of Hope*, 1987, is included in the group exhibition at P.S. 1, "Out of the Studio: Artist/Community."

1988

How Ya Like Me Now? (pp. 54–55) is exhibited by the Washington Project for the Arts as part of "The Blues Aesthetic," a group exhibition—much of it displayed in outdoor public spaces—exploring black culture in contemporary art. When Hammons' work is installed on a street corner in Washington D.C., it is immediately defaced by a group of 10 black construction workers with sledgehammers, who are offended by the depiction of Jesse Jackson as a white man. Jackson responds by saying he is not insulted by the work "because I understand it. My response was interpretation and intent. But I understand those that reacted violently. We must appreciate the source of their pain. They must not be painted out of the equation."

1989

Hammons mounts his largest solo exhibition in New York to date at Exit Art, the alternative SoHo exhibition space. The installation features toy trains tunneling under small mountains of coal and among the lids of grand pianos as John Coltrane's *Blue'trane* and James Brown's *Night Train* plays on a boom box. Also featured are wheel-like sculptures assembled from empty, discarded *Night Train* wine bottles. The installation, *Chasing the Blue Train*, is ultimately acquired by SMAK, the Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent, Belgium; examples of the wine bottle sculptures are now in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (pp. 60–61).



Installation view, "David Hammons: Rousing the Rubble, 1969–1990," P.S. 1, Long Island City, December 16, 1990–February 10, 1991.

1990

Hammons is awarded the Prix de Rome and spends much of the year in Rome as a fellow at the American Academy. His work is exhibited across Europe: an installation, *Spring Chicken*, at the American Academy; an installation, *Brief Intermission*, at the Casino Fantasma, Venice; a sculpture, *Smoking Tree*, in a group exhibition at Kettel's Yard, Cambridge; and a public project, *Public Toilets*, Temse, Belgium, in which he mounts urinals on living trees in a public park. In New York, his work is on view in back-to-back solo exhibitions at the Jack Tilton Gallery.

1990–1991

P.S. 1, Long Island City, mounts a mid-career retrospective of Hammons work entitled "Rousing the Rubble." Included in the exhibition is a room of basketball hoop sculptures, new versions of his *Higher Goals* works on an indoor scale. At the opening reception for the exhibition, Hammons stages his *Basketball Ballet*, inviting a group of men dressed in suits to play basketball on the hoops, accompanied by jazz played by the Jus Grew Orchestra. The exhibition travels to the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia and the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art. This is the last survey show organized with Hammons' cooperation until "David Hammons: Five Decades."

1991

Awarded a MacArthur Fellowship.

1992

Participates in documenta IX in Kassel, Germany. His untitled dreadlock sculpture created for documenta is acquired by the Whitney Museum of American Art (pp. 68–69). Hammons

stages *Haircut*, a performance in which he brings one of his stone Head sculptures capped with hair to a Harlem barbershop for a haircut. Beginning c. 1990, Hammons continues his Head sculptures through at least 2006 (pp. 84–85, 92–93).



Hammons installing *Untitled*, 1992, in documenta IX, Kassel, Germany, June 13–September 20, 1992.



Installation view, "Blues and the Abstract Truth," Kunsthalle Bern, May 17–June 29, 1997.

1993

Hammons is the subject of a solo exhibition in his hometown of Springfield, Illinois, held at the Illinois State Museum; he also participates in a two-person exhibition with Jannis Kounellis at the American Academy in Rome.

1993–1994

The solo exhibition "Yardbird Suite" is organized by the Williams College Museum of Art in Williamstown, Massachusetts, and travels to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

1995

Solo exhibition at the Salzburger Kunstverein, "David Hammons, Been There and Back."

1997

Solo exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern entitled "Blues and the Abstract Truth," after the album by jazz saxophonist Oliver Nelson. For this exhibition, Hammons bathes the rooms of the museum in a blue light by covering all of the windows and skylights with blue foil of slightly different shades. The seven galleries are left nearly empty, filled only with the music of John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, and Muddy Waters playing on tape decks. The viewer encounters only two other objects: a purple orchid, poised on the reception desk, and in the last gallery, a drum set, on which sleeps a curled up, taxidermied cat. In New York, Hammons' video work, *Phat Free* (originally titled *Kick the Bucket*, dated 1995/1999), is included in the Whitney Biennial.

1998

Solo exhibition at Gallery Shimada, Yamaguchi, Japan.

2000

For his solo exhibition, "David Hammons. Global Fax Festival," at the Reina Sofia, Madrid, Hammons provides 9 fax numbers to the public, who are invited to fax in anything they would like to machines placed near the ceiling of the museum's Palacio de Cristal. The result is thousands of faxes of drawings, letters, poems, etc., cascading from the ceiling and accumulating on the floor. They are ultimately copied and bound as the exhibition catalogue. Hammons is also the subject of a solo exhibition in Poland, "David Hammons: Real Time," at the Centrum Sztuki Wspolczesnej, Warsaw.

2001

Solo exhibition at Gallery Shimada, Yamaguchi, Japan. Hammons creates a work in which he places a huge boulder set in a miniature landscape on a flatbed truck, which travels from neighborhood to neighborhood in Yamaguchi.

2002

Hammons solo exhibition at Ace Gallery in New York, his first since 1990–1991, takes its title from the show's sole installation: "Concerto in Black and Blue." Hammons leaves the 20,000 square-foot gallery completely empty and dark, transforming it into a "black cube." Visitors are given key chain-sized flashlights at the door and invited to wander the void-like space, illuminated only by their flashlights' small beams of blue light.

Hammons has his first solo exhibition in London, "David Hammons: Antipodes I," at White Cube.



Installation view, "Hammons," L&M Arts, New York, January 18–March 31, 2007.

2003

Solo exhibition at Hauser & Wirth, Zurich.

2004

Participates in the Dak'Art Biennial in Dakar, Senegal, where he stages a sheep raffle. Hammons constructs makeshift stages far from the central art spaces of the Biennial, where residents gather daily in hopes of winning one of the dozen sheep raffled off.

2006

Participates in the Whitney Biennial by offering a painting by Miles Davis in lieu of contributing his own work. Triple Candie, a pop-up gallery in Harlem, mounts "David Hammons: The Unauthorized Retrospective," a "retrospective" that includes only photocopied reproductions of Hammons works, containing no actual works of art.

2006

Solo exhibition at Zwirner & Wirth, New York and the group exhibition, "L.A. Object and David Hammons Body Prints," at Tilton Gallery.

2007

Hammons and his wife Chie Hammons mount an exhibition at this gallery, then called L&M Arts, in which they debut the Fur Coat series. In an otherwise empty gallery, hung on antique dress forms, are full-length mink, fox, sable, wolf, and chinchilla coats that have been painted, burned, and stained.

Hammons work for Sculpture Projects Muenster consists of his making the prediction that it would rain on the 18th of August (it did not).

2011

Solo exhibition at L&M Arts, in which he debuts his Tarp Paintings.

2012

Hammons *Untitled (Kool-Aid)*, 2003, is included in the Museum of Modern Art's group exhibition, "Printin'." As is the case with many of Hammons' Kool-Aid Drawings, the work includes a raw-silk veil that shrouds the painted image beneath it. Per Hammons' instructions, the museum's wall label informs the visitor that the work may be viewed "by appointment only," and that he or she must email the museum to arrange an appointment. For the duration of the show, MoMA schedules visits during which a staff member lifts the fabric, allowing visitors to view the work beneath for a finite period of time.

2014

The two-person exhibition "David Hammons Yves Klein / Yves Klein David Hammons" is the inaugural exhibition at the new Aspen Art Museum, bringing together Hammons Basketball and Kool-Aid Drawings with Klein's Fire Paintings and Monochromes, among other pairings.

Solo exhibitions at White Cube, London, and Xavier Hufkens, Brussels.



Installation view, "David Hammons," L&M Arts, New York, January 26 – March 4, 2011.



Installation view, "David Hammons Yves Klein / Yves Klein David Hammons," Aspen Art Museum, August 9 – November 30, 2014.

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FIVE DECADES

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Captions:

Front and back covers: David Hammons, *Untitled*, 2013 (detail; see pages 106–107).
Page 2: David Hammons in Harlem, winter 1990.
Page 28: David Hammons pictured with *Spade (Power for the Spade)*, 1969, during the exhibition "Three Graphic Artists: Charles White, David Hammons, Timothy Washington," Los Angeles County Museum of Art, January–March 1971.
Pages 122–123: David Hammons in Harlem, 1980.

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