



MULTIPLICITY

BLACKNESS IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN COLLAGE

September 15–December 31, 2023

Frist Art Museum

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Cover: Jamea Richmond-Edwards. *Archetype of a 5 Star*, 2018. Acrylic, spray paint, glitter, ink, and cut paper on canvas; 60 x 48 in. Rubell Museum, Miami. © Jamea Richmond-Edwards

Tennessee State Standards

Visual Arts Standards

By analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating artworks, students fulfill the Respond domain of the Tennessee Fine Arts Standards. Synthesizing information and contextualizing the works applies to the Connect domain. The Present domain may involve selecting work for a portfolio, planning, creating, and displaying art to inform peers on social issues, or students selecting one work of art to leave at school to display. Teachers may address the Create domain by using the exhibition as inspiration to generate, conceptualize, develop, and refine artistic work.

Social Studies

K–12

SSP.01: Gather information from a variety of sources, including:

- Printed materials
- Graphic representations
- Artifacts
- Media and technology sources

SSP.02: Critically examine a primary or secondary source in order to:

- Summarize significant ideas and relevant information
- Distinguish between fact and opinion
- Draw conclusions
- Recognize author's purpose and point of view

Kindergarten

K.02: Compare and contrast family traditions and customs, including: food, clothing, homes, and games.

First Grade

1.02: Define multiculturalism as many different cultures living within a community and state.

1.03: Compare and contrast family traditions and customs among different cultures within a student's community and state.

Second Grade

2.01: Identify various cultural groups within the U.S. and the students' community.

2.02: Compare and contrast the beliefs, customs, ceremonies, and traditions of the various cultures represented in the U.S.

2.03: Distinguish how people from various cultures in the community and nation share principles, goals, and traditions.

Grades 9–12

African American History

AAH.49: Compare and contrast the responses of African Americans to the economic, social, and political challenges in the contemporary U.S.

AAH.50: Identify and evaluate major contemporary African American issues confronting society (e.g., affirmative action, educational achievement gap, wealth gap, poverty, AIDS, drug epidemic, crime).

AAG.51: Analyze the impact of immigration and migration on the lives of African Americans in the contemporary U.S.

AAH.52: Identify the major contributions of contemporary African Americans in business, education, the arts, politics, sports, science, technology, and society in general, including those of:

- President Barack Obama
- Condoleezza Rice
- Wilma Rudolph
- Tina Turner
- Oprah Winfrey

Contemporary Issues

CI.11: Analyze the lasting impact of history on contemporary issues (e.g., Treaty of Versailles, Cold War, ethnic cleansing, urbanization, human rights, immigration, modern medicine).

CI.22: Explain multiculturalism, and analyze trends in acculturation and assimilation.

Multiplicity: Blackness in Contemporary American Collage

Multiplicity presents over eighty major collage and collage-informed works that reflect the breadth and complexity of Black identity. Featuring an intergenerational group of fifty-two living artists, *Multiplicity* explores the varying ways collage is employed and how the technique suggests diverse conceptual concerns such as cultural hybridity, notions of beauty, gender fluidity, and historical memory. By assembling pieces of paper, photographs, fabric, and salvaged or repurposed materials, these artists create unified compositions that express the endless possibilities of Black-constructed narratives despite our fragmented society.

This educator guide highlights the work of five artists: Deborah Roberts, Derek Fordjour, Paul Anthony Smith, Jamea Richmond-Edwards, and Brittney Boyd Bullock. It includes brief background information and quotes from the artists. Collage activities are also included for pre-K–2nd grade; 3rd–5th grade, and 6th–12th grade.

Deborah Roberts

"I love the idea of the slicing, the cutting, the multiplicity of faces . . . that's [why] collage works for me."

—Deborah Roberts

Deborah Roberts is from Austin, Texas, where she lives and works today. Roberts sources the materials for her collages from a variety of places, including magazines and the internet. She sometimes reuses imagery, including the distinctive eyes of writer James Baldwin (see, for example, the boy in the red-and-white striped shirt in the image below) or the hands of First Lady Michelle Obama. She begins her works with the figures' faces and uses patterned paper and other materials to complete their bodies.



Deborah Roberts. *Let them be children*, 2018. Mixed media and collage on canvas; 45 1/8 x 140 1/8 in. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2019.1. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery. © Deborah Roberts. Photo: Sydney Collins, © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

"With collage, I can create a more expansive and inclusive view of the Black cultural experience."

—Deborah Roberts

Roberts focuses on youth because of their vulnerability to widespread negative messaging in popular culture. As the title of the work suggests, Roberts hopes that her work can challenge the ways in which Black children are seen in the world—let them simply be *children*.

Questions

- Look closely and describe what you see in *Let them be children*. What do you notice first? Why?
- Why do you think the artist combines images of different people to make the children in her work?
- What do the children's body language tell you about them as individuals? As a group?

Derek Fordjour

"Excavation is . . . a big part of my process. The surfaces are accumulated over time. It takes about two or three weeks to make a surface before I start, and that process is adhering layers so there's literally like a kind of dermis/epidermis . . . approach to building layers. And then, when I do work on the top, I often cut away and excavate layers quite literally. So, I can peel and tear and expose the kind of subterranean layers—so, that's really important to me."

—Derek Fordjour

Derek Fordjour was born in Memphis, Tennessee, to parents of Ghanaian heritage. He now lives in New York City but keeps close ties to his hometown. Fordjour uses materials like newspaper, cardboard, and foil in his work because they are inexpensive and easily accessible. Fordjour begins his collages by layering cardboard and newspaper on canvases. He specifically uses the *Financial Times* because of its unique hue. After painting, he then tears and carves at the surface, resulting in its rich and distinctive appearance.



Derek Fordjour. *Airborne Double*, 2022. Acrylic, charcoal, cardboard, oil pastel, and foil on newspaper mounted on canvas; 60 x 100 in. Frances Fine Art Collection, courtesy of the artist, David Kordansky Gallery, and Petzel Gallery. Photo: Daniel Greer. © Derek Fordjour

An alum of Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, Fordjour expresses the vitality of the experience at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as well as the draw of competition, pageantry, and spectacle in multilayered works spotlighting drum majors or other marching band members.

"I'm attracted to the drum major because it takes the form that predominantly white institutions use . . . band culture is kind of the same if you look at uniforms, but what happens in HBCU culture is this kind of variation on a theme where the gestures, the movement, the canon of music that they're using is just kind of drenched in . . . Black culture."

—Derek Fordjour

Hear Derek Fordjour talk about his artistic process at FristArtMuseum.org/Multiplicity.

Questions

- Look closely at the texture and detail of *Airborne Double*. What stands out to you? Why?
- This collage shows members of a marching band. Imagine the environment around them. What is the mood? What would you hear, see, and smell?
- How are the two band members alike? Different?

Paul Anthony Smith

"Collage, in a way, [is thinking about] how memory is sort of dismantled. And so, I'm trying to bring the pieces back together."

—Paul Anthony Smith

Jamaican-born, New York-based artist Paul Anthony Smith modifies photographic images—often ones he made in the Caribbean during his travels or featuring Caribbean subjects. After digitally collaging the photographs and printing them on a large scale, he alters their surfaces. Smith studied ceramics at the Kansas City Art Institute and often uses ceramics tools and techniques when creating two-dimensional works. His innovative *picotage* technique involves using a ceramics tool to pick at the surface of his photo collages in intricate patterns.



Paul Anthony Smith. *CARICOM*, 2022. Found flags, unique picotage, and acrylic on inkjet print mounted on museum board and Dibond; 80 x 120 x 6 in. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. © Paul Anthony Smith

"I'm from Jamaica and I never really hear much about the other Caribbean nations or the network of Caribbean countries, and so, I was trying to collapse these ideas within one work. So, *CARICOM* is a 'Caribbean community,' and I gave the work that title because we're, out of many, one people."

—Paul Anthony Smith

The photos used in *CARICOM* were made by Smith in 2022 during a visit to the West Indian Day Parade held in Brooklyn, New York. The flags pinned to the surface were also collected during the parade and represent some of the Caribbean countries celebrated during this annual event. The pattern Smith created on the surface of the work is reminiscent of the bricks used to create breezeways in Caribbean architecture.

Hear Paul Anthony Smith talk about his artistic process at FristArtMuseum.org/Multiplicity.

Questions

- What does this collage tell you about the artist's identity?
- How does the artist use his knowledge of ceramics to create this piece?
- What elements in this work reflect the artist's Caribbean identity?

Jamea Richmond-Edwards

"Working in that mixed-media framework . . . that's just part of, like, hip-hop culture, this concept of sampling . . . using source materials, found objects. . . . I began to understand myself as a part of this expansive vernacular of art making within the Black community."

—Jamea Richmond-Edwards

Jamea Richmond-Edwards was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, where she currently lives and works. An art educator for more than thirteen years, Richmond-Edwards often uses materials found in the classroom. Her works begin with acrylic paint, then she adds paper, rhinestones, glitter, and other found materials, including fabric.

Richmond-Edwards is influenced by the 1990s hip-hop fashion she saw growing up in Detroit. Much of her work points to the role that Black women play in consuming fashion, even though they historically have been absent from advertising campaigns and fashion shows. *Archetype of a 5 Star* is inspired by the vibrantly dressed young women she encountered in the Black neighborhood of her youth. The title is taken from a rap song by Yo Gotti, featuring Gucci Mane, Trina, and Nicki Minaj.



Jamea Richmond-Edwards. *Archetype of a 5 Star*, 2018. Acrylic, spray paint, glitter, ink, and cut paper on canvas; 60 x 48 in. Rubell Museum, Miami. © Jamea Richmond-Edwards

"I was inspired by the rap song. . . . [It's] just talking about being, like, a really classy woman . . . just being a fly chick and understanding that as an archetype of queen."

—Jamea Richmond-Edwards

Hear Jamea Richmond-Edwards talk about her artistic process at FristArtMuseum.org/Multiplicity.

Questions

- How would you describe the central figure in this collage?
- The artist talks about mixed media and bringing together different parts to make something new. How does this creative approach change how we see a work of art?
- What might this collage tell you about the artist's experiences and interests?

Brittney Boyd Bullock

"I'm also looking for materials and paper that remind me of my childhood and . . . invoke a sense of memory for me. So, I'm looking for things like tissue paper and aluminum foil . . . things that remind me of my grandmother or, you know, my mother keeping the tissue paper from gifts. . . . The significance of the materials are [*sic*] important."

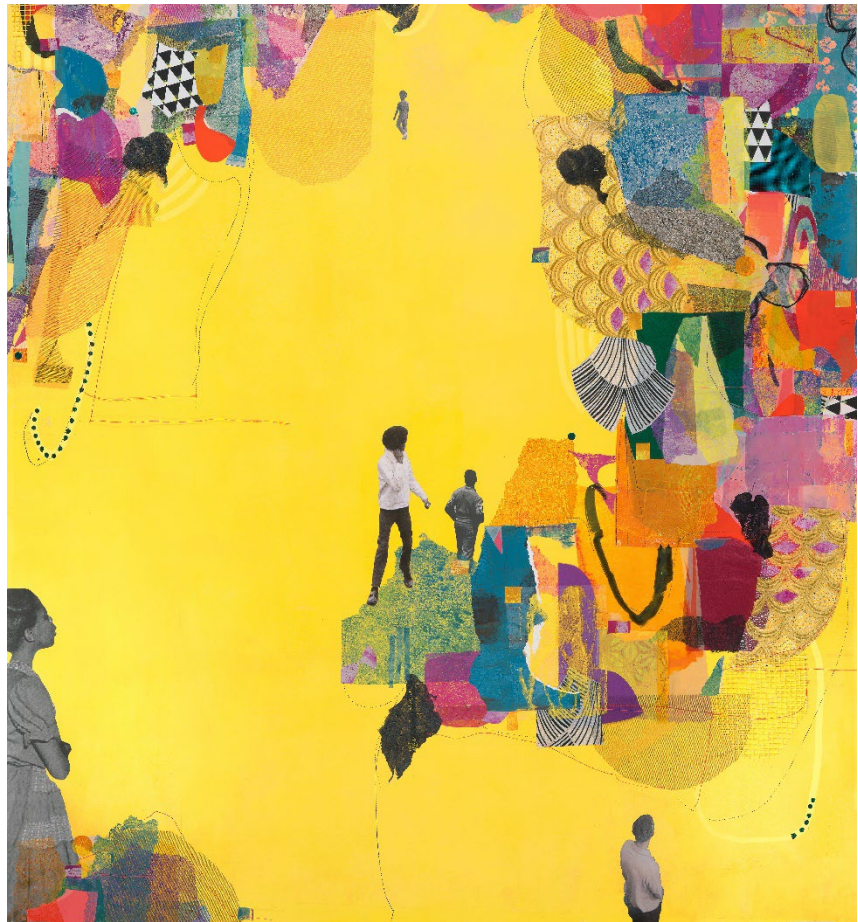
—Brittney Boyd Bullock

Brittney Boyd Bullock was born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee. She sees herself making order from disorder by combining various elements into unified abstractions. She uses an array of materials that hold personal significance for her, including fabric, paper, tissue paper, and tulle. She often makes her own paper using a monoprinting technique.

No It Ain't, Yes It Is straddles representation and abstraction. An intentionally ambiguous scene of vivid chaos, the central figures are turned away from each other. Bullock purposely does not show their faces to keep them sacred—the viewer does not know their stories, leaving the collage open to interpretation.

"The work that I made for the show is really about this idea of, you know—what we see, is it real or imagined? What we think, is it true or not? . . . Looking at these different, opposing ideas based on your perspective."

—Brittney Boyd Bullock



Brittney Boyd Bullock. *No It Ain't, Yes It Is*, 2023. Monoprinted paper, fabric, paper, acrylic, tulle, thread, felt, canvas, and tissue paper; 45 x 42 in. Courtesy of the artist. © Brittney Boyd Bullock

Hear Brittney Boyd Bullock talk about her artistic process at FristArtMuseum.org/Multiplicity.

Questions

- Look closely and describe what you see in *No It Ain't, Yes It Is*. What do you notice about the colors, materials, and composition of the piece?
- The artist wants the viewer to interpret this collage on their own. What do you think is happening?
- What thoughts, memories, or mood does this piece evoke for you?

Activities

Pre-K–2nd Grade: Color and Shape Collage

Objective

Participants will make line, shape, and pattern drawings and use colorful shapes to create a collage.

Materials

- Washable black markers
- White tagboard (9 x 12 in.)
- Glue sticks
- Pre-cut tissue paper shapes
- Pre-cut cellophane shapes

Steps

1. Give each participant a sheet of white tagboard and a black marker. Have them draw lines, shapes, and patterns on their tagboards. Younger participants may need some help.
2. After they complete their drawings, give each participant some assorted tissue paper and cellophane shapes. Demonstrate how overlapping differently colored shapes will change their color. Overlapping a red shape and a blue shape will make purple, for example.
3. Have participants arrange their shapes on their tagboards, overlapping the shapes and covering their drawings.
4. Have participants use glue sticks to glue their shapes down. The drawings will still be visible, and the overlapping shapes will result in colorful works of art.
5. After they complete their collages, encourage participants to share their work with the group.

3rd Grade–5th Grade: Identity Collage

Objective

Participants will create collages that highlight personal identity and experiences.

Materials

- Pencils
- Paper
- White tagboard (9 x 12 in.)
- Markers
- Photographs
- Paper collage materials (magazines, postcards, paper scraps, etc.)
- Fabric
- Scissors
- Glue sticks

Steps

1. Have participants reflect on personal identity and experiences. Have them think about and write down personality traits, habits, cultural identity, interests, likes, dislikes, hobbies, relationships, and other details that make them who they are.
2. Give the group time to identify objects and images that represent personal identity, then gather collage elements like papers, fabric, and magazine cuttings. Participants may also incorporate their own drawings, photographs, and other materials.
3. Have participants plan the arrangement or composition of their collages on their tagboard. Take some time to experiment. If they'd like, they may use colored or patterned paper to create a background and build their collages from there.
4. Once all the pieces of the collage are arranged, participants may begin gluing them to the tagboard. They may also use colored pencils, markers, or paint to add detail to their collage.
5. After they complete their collages, encourage participants to share their work with the group and discuss their artistic choices.

6th Grade–12th Grade: Mixed Media Identity Collage

Objective

Participants will use a variety of media to create rich, layered collages that highlight personal identity and experiences.

Materials

- Pencils
- Paper
- Tempera paints
- Paintbrushes
- Cups
- Paper palettes
- White tagboard (9 x 12 in.)
- Markers
- Photographs
- Paper collage materials (magazines, postcards, paper scraps, etc.)
- Scissors
- Mylar
- Fabric
- Stencils
- Found objects
- Glue sticks
- Hot glue

Steps

1. Have participants begin by reflecting on personal identity and experiences. Have them think about and write down personality traits, habits, cultural identities, interests, likes, dislikes, hobbies, relationships, and other details that make them who they are.
2. Have participants choose a variety of materials that help them convey their identities through their collages.
3. Have participants begin their collages by applying paint, arranging paper with desired colors and patterns, drawing a design, or otherwise creating the ground on their pieces of white tagboard. Using wet media may require drying time.
4. Participants may continue building their collages with magazine cuttings, patterns, text, small objects, and freehand or stencil drawings relevant to their personal identity. They may also include photographs or drawings of themselves.
5. After they complete their collages, encourage participants to share their work with the group and discuss their artistic choices.

Resources

Books

Snippets: A Story About Paper Shapes, by Diane Alber (author and illustrator)

I Like Myself!, by Karen Beaumont (author) and David Catrow (illustrator)

Hold Them Close: A Love Letter to Black Children, by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow (author) and Patrick Dougher (illustrator)

The Best Part of Me: Children Talk About their Bodies in Pictures and Words, by Wendy Ewald (author)

My Hands Sing the Blues: Romare Bearden's Childhood Journey, by Jeanne Walker Harvey (author) and Elizabeth Zunon (illustrator)

Black Artists Shaping the World, by Sharna Jackson (author) with contributions by Dr. Zoé Whitley

Thank You, Omu! and *¡Gracias, Omu!* (Spanish edition), by Oge Mora (author and illustrator)

The Story of Juneteenth, by Dorena Williamson (author) and Markia Jenai (illustrator)

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