



MULTIPLICITY

Blackness in Contemporary American Collage

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

The first large-scale exhibition of its kind, *Multiplicity: Blackness in Contemporary American Collage* features over eighty works of art by fifty-two makers that reflect the breadth and complexity of Black life today. To counter a false perception of Blackness as a monolith, artists utilize the different elements inherent in the collage process to convey the various facets of their unique lived experiences. Collage as a symbol of expanded notions of personhood can be seen as both a twist on W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness as articulated in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and an extension of the term "post-Black," which was coined in 2001 in reference to artists who seek to address more than race in their work.

This intergenerational group of artists is building on a technique that has roots in European and American traditions. Collage has been used by canonical figures from Pablo Picasso and Hannah Höch to Robert Rauschenberg and, of paramount importance for this project, Romare Bearden, who is considered the father of African American collage. The artists gather pieces of paper, fabric, and other, often salvaged, materials to create works that express the endless possibilities of Black-constructed narratives despite the fragmentation of our times. For some of the artists, collage is their signature artmaking strategy, while for others, it represents a branch or chapter in their wider practice. Deborah Roberts (see fig. 1) clearly asserts her reason for being drawn to the medium:



Figure 1





Figure 2

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

The exhibition begins by introducing the range of materials and techniques used in the collage process, from relatively straightforward cutting and pasting to more complicated layering and interweaving with other media. Then it examines how artists combine disparate elements to evoke shared histories and memories ranging from the Middle Passage to the vitality of HBCU campus life. For artists born outside of the United States, collage reflects a cultural hybridity that forms as they navigate life in a new country while staying closely connected to their homeland. Other artists deconstruct notions of beauty and power centered on whiteness that are widely promoted in both fine art and popular culture (see fig. 2). Notions of beauty are intertwined

with gender constructs, and several queer artists in *Multiplicity* express the fluid nature of gender, reminding us that we live in an increasingly nonbinary world. They also honor safe spaces for communal and intimate interaction that are becoming even more vital as queer people are increasingly under literal and legislative attack. Although most of the work in the exhibition is representational, some artists use various types of paper to create deeply personal abstractions. *Multiplicity* concludes by expanding the definition of collage beyond analog practices to include digital stitches, an inevitable evolution in today's digitally saturated environment.

Although *Multiplicity* is wide reaching in scope, with artists ranging in age from thirty to eighty and working across the country, there are many more Black artists currently making collages. We hope this exhibition brings attention to and spurs future projects on this understudied yet ubiquitous art form used by students and professionals alike. We also hope *Multiplicity* prompts us to consider what parts of ourselves—heritage, sex, gender identity, physical ability, religion, class, race, and much more—unite to make us who we are.

Katie Delmez
Senior Curator

Figure 1: Deborah Roberts. *Let them be children*, 2018. Mixed media and collage on canvas. 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. Figure 2: Jamea Richmond-Edwards. *Archetype of a 5 Star*, 2018. Acrylic, spray paint, glitter, ink, and cut paper on canvas. Rubell Museum, Miami. © Jamea Richmond-Edwards

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