BAMPFA Exhibition Reimagines the Role of African Diasporic Art in Museum Settings

On View May 17—July 21, 2019

About Things Loved: Blackness and Belonging Marks Major Collaboration Between BAMPFA and UC Berkeley Student Curators

(Berkeley, CA) April 30, 2019—A new exhibition at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) radically reframes the historical relationship between museums and Black culture. About Things Loved: Blackness and Belonging presents major artworks by Black artists from Africa and the African diaspora, organized to showcase the vibrancy that emerges when blackness is relocated from the margins to the center of museum settings. The exhibition presents more than thirty works from the collections of BAMPFA and UC Berkeley's Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, bringing together artistic voices from different generations and nationalities to address questions of blackness and belonging in Western museums.

About Things Loved is organized by students in the UC Berkeley graduate seminar Diaspora | Migration | Exile, cotaught by Associate Professors Lauren Kroiz and Leigh Raiford through the Department of History of Art and the Department of African American Studies. Working collaboratively with BAMPFA's curatorial team, students have chosen works from BAMPFA and the Hearst's permanent collections made largely by Black artists that engage with themes of Black cultural and artistic expression. The exhibition marks the third installment in BAMPFA’s Cal Conversations program, a series of annual exhibitions developed in collaboration with UC Berkeley classes.

About Things Loved features works by Peter Bradley, Erica Deeman, Charles Gaines, Mildred Howard, Kamau Amu Patton, Raymond Saunders, Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, Fred Wilson, and many others—a roster that includes both established artists and those whose work has been
Roots and Routes: Blackness as Belonging, which focuses on the legacy of African diasporic culture as it emerged from the historical trauma of the global slave trade. Works by Carrie Mae Weems, Lorna Simpson, and Fred Wilson that appear in this section suggest a dialogue between diasporic communities in the past, present, and future that are working to come to terms with this legacy.

On Collecting and Belonging, which presents artworks alongside museum registrars’ documentation of their history and provenance, in order to pose questions about the notion of cultural ownership and museums’ historical collecting practices.

Embodiment and Materiality, which demonstrates the range of approaches to representing Black bodies and Black life, troubling the divides between the figurative and the abstract (e.g., Romare Bearden’s collages, Erica Deeman’s portrait-silhouettes and Chakaia Booker’s meticulously textured rubber sculptures).

Abstraction, which offers a corrective to the absence of Black voices in museum surveys of twentieth-century abstract art, presenting among other notable works a painting from BAMPFA’s collection by Hervé Télémaque that has not been exhibited in decades.

On Blackness and Belonging, which presents work by contemporary Black artists—including such notable female voices as Margo Humphreys, Mildred Howard, and Faith Ringgold—to suggest a sense of transhistorical community and belonging in the wake of historical trauma and continuing injustice.

"Like so many of our institutions, museums have a historical legacy of practices that exclude, marginalize, and devalue Black voices in both the art world and the broader culture,” said Associate Professor Leigh Raiford, speaking on behalf of the Diaspora | Migration | Exile class. “By redirecting our attention to the work of Black artists that are represented in UC Berkeley’s museum collections, About Things Loved points audiences toward new ways of thinking about the role of blackness in museum spaces.”

“While BAMPFA has a strong track record in showcasing artists from historically marginalized communities, we—and the museum field—must do more to disrupt a historical legacy that has minimized the contributions of Black artists in museum spaces for far too long,” said BAMPFA Director and Chief Curator Lawrence Rinder. “As a university art museum embedded in one of America’s most progressive communities, BAMPFA is uniquely positioned to address these inequities—which we’re proud to do in partnership with the incredibly talented students and professors of this year’s Cal Conversations program, as well as our distinguished colleagues at the Hearst Museum.”

“As a class, we built upon our discussions and readings to attempt new modes of curatorial practice that loves Black life and objects,” said Delphine Sims and Meg Alvarado-Saggese, both students in Diaspora | Migration | Exile. “We aimed to immerse viewers in an exhibition that critiqued museum history, celebrated arts of the African diaspora, and modeled an ethics of care for blackness in all of its multiplicities.”

In conjunction with About Things Loved, BAMPFA is mounting a Juneteenth celebration on Wednesday, June 19 that includes a screening and discussion with the artist Mildred Howard, whose work is on view in the exhibition. Howard joins Raiford and Rinder in conversation following a presentation of Pam Uzzell’s Welcome to the Neighborhood, a new documentary exploring Howard’s Bay Area roots and the impact of gentrification. The program begins at noon and is free with museum admission; it is cosponsored by UC Berkeley’s Black Staff and Faculty Organization and the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society.
Thanks

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Above
Romare Bearden: Continuities, 1969; collage on board; 50 x 43 in.; BAMPFA, gift of the Childe Hassam Fund of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, © 2019 Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

Visitor Information
Address
2155 Center Street, Berkeley, CA 94720
Hours
Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
$13 general admission
$11 non-UC Berkeley students, disabled, 65+
FREE BAMPFA members; UC Berkeley students, faculty, staff; 18 & under; one adult per child 13 & under

Information
bampfa.org
(510) 642-0808

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About BAMPFA
An internationally recognized arts institution with deep roots in the Bay Area, the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) is a forum for cultural experiences that transform individuals and advance the local, national, and global discourse on art and film. BAMPFA is UC Berkeley’s premier visual arts venue, presenting more than 450 film screenings, scores of public
programs, and more than twenty exhibitions annually. With its vibrant and eclectic programming, BAMPFA inspires the imagination and ignites critical dialogue through art, film, and other forms of creative expression.

The institution’s collection of more than 25,000 works of art dates from 3000 BCE to the present day and includes important holdings of Neolithic Chinese ceramics, Ming and Qing Dynasty Chinese painting, Old Master works on paper, Italian Baroque painting, early American painting, Abstract Expressionist painting, contemporary photography, and Conceptual art. BAMPFA’s collection also includes more than 17,500 films and videos, including the largest collection of Japanese cinema outside of Japan, impressive holdings of Soviet cinema, West Coast avant-garde film, and seminal video art, as well as hundreds of thousands of articles, reviews, posters, and other ephemera related to the history of film.