

Introduction

As an artist and a thinker we encountered and present these bodies of work created by African-American artists in the American South. Through time spent with the artists we appreciated the cultural and aesthetic clarity of these works and the wealth of achievement of the artists and makers. They demonstrate a powerful care for the world we live in. The work in the exhibition reminds us of the power of art in an age of street protest. We would like to thank Turner Contemporary who have worked tirelessly to make this exhibition possible.

Hannah Collins and Paul Goodwin

The work in this exhibition is made by African-American artists in the American South during the second half of the 20th Century to the present.

Slavery and segregation shaped the rural and industrial economies of the South and created a regime of racial terror. Much of the art in *We Will Walk* was made within this context. Produced in outdoor yards, the work takes many forms, from ephemeral environments made from salvaged materials to sculptural assemblages, paintings, musical instruments and quilts.

In the segregated South creators drew on black Southern cosmology, musical improvisation, American history, African traditions and more recently, popular culture, as material for their work. Blues and Spiritual music were exported from the

South to the rest of the United States and beyond. The art in *We Will Walk* can be seen as a visual equivalent to this musical improvisation but has been overlooked until relatively recently.

Walking as an act of courage and protest came to the fore during the Civil Rights period (1954–1968) as the title of this exhibition reflects. Activists like writer James Baldwin and photographer Doris Derby went to the South to bear witness and demand change. Vast communal acts like the historic marches from Selma to Montgomery (1965) started a process of transformation that gradually allowed hidden artistic practices to become visible.

This exhibition highlights the innovative visual languages created by these artists, their relationship to history, the environment, and their influence on American culture. In a new era of protest and resistance, *We Will Walk* presents the extraordinary creativity of these artists working outside of the mainstream for the first time in the UK.

Hannah Collins and Paul Goodwin

Timeline

1522

African slaves stage a rebellion in Hispaniola (present day Haiti and Dominican Republic). This is the first slave uprising in the New World.

1526

Enslaved men, women and children taken to the Spanish colonies in the present-day states of Florida and Georgia. These Africans liberate themselves and make home with local indigenous people.

1619

“20 or odd Negroes” from present-day Angola are traded for food in Jamestown, Virginia. Jamestown is the first permanent British colony in what will become the United States of America. There were already 32 unfree Africans in Virginia—it is not recorded when or how they arrived. Although this year has become a symbolic year for the start of American slavery, historians note that Africans had been taken against their will to the Americas over a century earlier.

1739

The Stono Rebellion takes place in South Carolina. In the following year, South Carolina passes the 1740 Negro Act, prohibiting enslaved people from learning to read or growing their own food, and enabling white overseers to whip or kill enslaved people for being “rebellious.”

1773

Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral, written by Phillis Wheatley, an African born enslaved woman, is published. It is the first book written by an African-American woman published in the United States and only the second book in the nation’s history authored by a woman to be published.

1781

'The Zong Massacre' takes place. When the slave ship called Zong runs out of drinking water before reaching port in Jamaica, its crew throws 130 enslaved Africans into the ocean to their deaths, in an effort to collect the insurance money.

1783

The Treaty of Paris is signed between the United States and Great Britain, ending the American Revolution. The United States declares dominion over native lands east of the Mississippi River, by right of conquest.

1792

Benjamin Banneker, free African-American and largely self-taught astrologist, begins to publish a series of almanacs, which gains scientific acceptance and distribution in many free states.

1797

Insurrection is orchestrated by slave women aboard the ship Thomas.

1808

US Congress bans the importation of slaves from Africa.

1830

President Andrew Jackson signs the Indian Removal Act, and throughout the next decade, tens of thousands of Native Americans are forcibly expelled from southeastern states, including Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia, and relocated to areas West of the Mississippi designated as "Indian territory". The relocation is known as "the Trail of Tears."

1831

Nat Turner, an African-American preacher, leads a slave revolt in Virginia. Turner would be caught and executed. The southern state reacted by banning the Black people, enslaved and free, from learning

to read or bear arms and requiring white ministers preside over all black worship services. It also makes the possession of abolitionist publications a criminal offense.

1847

Frederick Douglass publishes his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. It is considered to be one of the most influential pieces of literature that fuelled the abolitionist movement. Two years later, Douglass launches *The North Star*, an abolitionist newspaper, named after the star used by escaped slaves to navigate.

1849

Harriet Tubman escapes from slavery and becomes an important leader of the Underground Railroad, a complex covert transport network helping enslaved people reach safety.

1851

Sojourner Truth delivers her powerful 'Ain't I a Woman?' speech at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio.

1857

In the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* case, the Supreme Court rules that slaves cannot claim citizenship.

1861

Seven southern states form the Confederacy and secede from the United States, triggering the beginning of the American Civil War.

1863

Harriet Tubman serves as a strategist for the Union Army during the US Civil War, and leads a troupe of 300 black soldiers on a military raid Combahee River region of South Carolina, freeing 750 people.

President Abraham Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation (The 13th Amendment), declaring that 'all persons held as slaves' in the Confederate states 'are, and henceforward shall be free'.

1865

On 19th June 1865, known as "Juneteenth", slaves in Galveston Texas are informed by an army general, that they are free.

President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated in Washington, D.C.

Sharecropping replaces enslaved labour as the dominant workforce of the cotton-producing South. It often resulted in sharecroppers being in debt to the landowner.

The Civil War comes to an end and the Freedmen's Bureau is created to protect the rights of former slaves.

The Ku Klux Klan is formed.

The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolishing slavery comes into effect.

1865–66

'Black codes' passed by Southern states, drastically restricting the rights of newly freed ex-slaves.

1868

Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution ratified, guaranteeing citizenship for those born or naturalized in the United States, including former slaves.

1870

Fifteenth Amendment to the US Constitution ratified, under which African-American men have voting rights; in practice these rights are severely restricted for nearly 100 years.

1877

The era of Reconstruction ends, and the period of lynching begins. Between 1887 and 1950, at least 4,084 African-Americans are lynched, mostly in southern states.

1880

Former Confederate Major, Samuel Lawrence James, acquires the joined plantation lands upon which he was commissioned to build what would become America's largest prison – the Louisiana State Penitentiary – nicknamed “Angola” after the country from which many enslaved Africans in Louisiana had come. The prison is infamous for its harsh conditions and its early and enduring “convict labour” scheme, into which cash-poor unemployed black men were systematically funnelled.

The Tuskegee Institute is founded by Booker T. Washington, providing free tuition to African Americans in Alabama.

1892

Ida B. Wells, born in 1862 in Mississippi, publishes her important research on lynching in southern states, which underlies her campaign for anti-lynching legislation.

1890s

Jim Crow laws are passed, enforcing a system of racial segregation in all public areas (the name evolved out of a popular minstrel routine from the 1830s).

1896

In the Plessy v. Ferguson case, the Supreme Court rules that racial segregation is constitutional. The court defends its ruling with the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine.

1903

The Souls of Black Folk by W.E.B. Du Bois is published. He is a pioneer of African American activism and the Civil Rights struggle.

1905

Madame C.J. Walker invents hair products for Black people and is the wealthiest self-made woman in the United States by the time of her death. Her philanthropy benefits the National Negro Business League and the NAACP anti-lynching campaign.

1909

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is founded by, among others, W.E.B. Du Bois.

1910

The 'Great Migration' begins. Around six million African-Americans move from the South to northern, mid-western and western cities.

1914

Marcus Garvey founds the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Jamaica, calling for autonomy and the establishment of an independent black nation in Africa; Garvey's pan-Africanism becomes influential among many African Americans.

1920s

The Harlem Renaissance, or "the New Negro Movement," begins. It is an artistic, social and intellectual explosion centered around Harlem, New York. Notable figures in this period include Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude MacKay, Jean Toomer and Alain Locke.

African-American scientist George Washington Carver, based at Tuskegee Institute, develops techniques to improve soil depleted by repeated plantings of cotton.

Jazz becomes a popular music form.

1920

Women's suffrage is ratified and women are given the right to vote.

1921

Over two days mobs of white residents attack Black residents and businesses in a district of Tulsa, Oklahoma known as Black Wall Street. Up to 300 people are estimated to have been killed. This is known as the Greenwood Massacre.

1923

Bessie Smith, born in Tennessee, becomes the first million-selling African-American artist with her record "Down-Hearted Blues".

1932

For forty years, the Public Health Service, in collaboration with the University of Tuskegee in Alabama, administers placebos to 400 African-American men with latent syphilis rather than treat the disease. This is done without their knowledge or consent; many die of syphilis or complications.

1934

In 1934, after being accused of "associating with a white woman" in Newton, Texas, John Griggs is hanged and shot seventeen times and his body is dragged behind a car through the town for hours.

Zora Neale Hurston, born in Alabama, publishes her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*.

1936

Jesse Owens, son of an Alabama sharecropper, wins four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics in Nazi Germany.

1937

Katherine Dunham forms the Negro Dance Group, a company of Black artists dedicated to presenting aspects of African-American and African-Caribbean Dance. The company eventually becomes the Katherine Dunham Group.

Redoshi, a woman from present-day Benin, the last known survivor of the transatlantic slave trade, dies in Alabama.

William Edmondson, a sculptor from Tennessee and son of two formerly enslaved people, is the first African-American to have a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

1939

World War II begins, following the rise of several far-right governments in Europe.

Billie Holiday records *Strange Fruit*. The song is an anti-lynching anthem.

Marian Anderson is refused permission by the Daughters of the American Revolution to sing to an integrated audience at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C.

1940

Frederick McKinnley Jones patents his design of portable refrigeration coolers, which greatly improves the ability for long-haul transportation of perishable food. Units he designs are used to transport blood, medicine and food to army hospitals and battlefields during the Second World War.

Richard Wright publishes his first novel, *Native Son*.

1941

The Second Great Migration begins, and by 1970, five million African Americans leave the South for northern and western cities.

1945

World War II ends.

1950

The United States enters the Korean War.

1952

Malcolm X becomes a minister in the Nation of Islam, which is at odds with the non-violent approaches of the civil rights movement.

Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man* is published.

1953

James Baldwin's novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is published.

1954

The Supreme Court holds in *Brown v. Board of Education* that separate facilities are unequal and declares that segregation in public education is unconstitutional. Whilst this is seen a major victory for civil rights, white supremacists in the South pledge a resistance to desegregation. Federal intervention is required to implement the ruling. Schools in the U.S. South remain de facto segregated in 2020.

Nina Simone records *Mississippi Goddamn*, which becomes a civil rights anthem.

The Civil Rights Era begins, in which African-Americans push for legal and political reforms for equal treatment under the law.

1955

Reverend George W. Lee, an NAACP activist, is killed in Belzoni, Mississippi while registering people to vote. Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African-American boy, on a visit to Money, Mississippi, is brutally maimed and murdered by Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam for allegedly flirting with and insulting Bryant's wife in Bryant's Grocery Store.

His body is then dumped in the Tallahatchie River.

Emmett Till's mother Mamie Bradley, decides to hold an open-casket funeral for her son. Jet magazine publishes pictures of Till's mutilated corpse, which causes public horror and outrage. Over 100,000 people attend Till's funeral in Chicago, and if the funeral is considered an official protest, it is the largest Civil Rights demonstration in American history until this point.

The United States enters the protracted twenty-year war in Vietnam. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. and boxer Mohammed Ali, speak against the war, denouncing it as racist and colonialist.

Marian Anderson is the first African American to sing at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery, Alabama bus. Her defiance prompts the year-long Montgomery bus boycott, the first mass direct action of the contemporary Civil Rights Movement. The boycott results in the abolition of public transport segregation laws in the state.

1956

Musician Nat King Cole is attacked while performing at the Municipal Auditorium in segregated Birmingham, Alabama.

After a legal battle fought by the NAACP, Autherine Lucy becomes the first African-American to enroll at a white school in Alabama; Lucy is suspended and then expelled within days.

1957

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), is established by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Charles Steele and Fred Shuttlesworth.

Nine African-American students (the 'Little Rock Nine') are prevented from attending the Little Rock Central High School. They are turned away by a large crowd of white citizens and armed troops from the Arkansas National Guard, on the orders of state Governor, Orval Faubus. Television and newspaper reports draw international attention to the issue of school desegregation.

President Eisenhower signs the Civil Rights Act of 1957 to protect voter rights.

1959

Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* debuts on Broadway.

Berry Gordy starts Tamla Records, which is incorporated as Motown Records the following year.

1960

Four African-American college students stage a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. The non-violent demonstration inspires a campaign of similar actions across the South.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is established to engage local communities, expose injustice and demand federal action.

Harper Lee, a white writer from Alabama, provokes debate with the publication of *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

1961

Freedom rides' take place, in which civil rights activists take interstate buses to test whether segregation is still enforced in terminal facilities; the 'freedom riders' are often subjected to mob violence.

Leontyne Price, born in Mississippi, becomes the first African-American to sing a lead role at the New York Metropolitan Opera. The previous year, she was the first African-American to sing at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan.

1962

President Kennedy is forced to deploy 5,000 federal troops when riots greet the enrolment of the University of Mississippi's first African-American student.

1963

Protests begin at segregated lunch counters in Birmingham, Alabama and protestors are repeatedly arrested. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is arrested after leading another march and writes his famous 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail'.

Bombs are detonated by the Ku Klux Klan at key locations of the civil rights movement in Birmingham. Eugene 'Bull' Connor, in charge of police and firemen, supports the KKK. He orders the police to use clubs and dogs on the marchers, and firemen to use high-pressure water hoses to disperse crowds.

The bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama results in the deaths of four young girls (Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson and Cynthia Wesley) and injures several others. The bombing causes national outrage.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers his 'I Have a Dream' speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the largest civil rights protest in U.S. history.

John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

1964

Malcolm X, suspended from the Nation of Islam in 1963, travels to Mecca for the Hajj pilgrimage. His experience results in a more moderate approach to race relations.

President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This wide-ranging legislation provides for the end of segregation in all public places and outlaws racial, religious or gender discrimination in employment.

Sidney Poitier becomes the first African-American to win a Best Actor Academy Award, for *Lilies of the Field*.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. receives the Nobel Peace Prize.

1965

Hundreds march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, to peacefully protest against requirements restricting African-Americans' right to vote in the state; they are attacked by police and state troopers as they reach the Edmund Pettus Bridge. News coverage of the violence results in an increase in popular support for the protesters' cause. The march grows to 25,000 by the time it reaches the state capitol.

President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965, preventing the use of literacy tests as a voting requirement.

Rioting erupts in the predominantly African-American neighbourhood of Watts in south central Los Angeles, resulting in the deaths of 35 people.

Noah Purifoy and Judson Powell create *66 Signs of Neon*, a national touring exhibition that features the debris from the Watts Rebellion in Los Angeles.

1966

Huey Newton and Bobby Seale found the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence.

The term 'Black Power' is first used as a rallying call by SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael, galvanising the less moderate sections of the civil rights movement, who demand autonomy rather than integration.

Prompted by the length of time it took police to get to her neighbourhood in Queens, Marie von Brittain Brown invents the Home Security System.

1st World Festival of Black Arts known as Festac was held in Dakar in 1966 under the auspices of UNESCO. 45 African, European, Caribbean and South African countries participated. It was the first state-sponsored festival to showcase the work of African diaspora artists, musicians and writers for global audience.

1967

Thurgood Marshall is appointed as a Justice of the Supreme Court, the first African American to serve in that position.

In the case of Loving v. Virginia, the Supreme Court finds the ban on interracial marriage in several states to be unconstitutional.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., travels to Memphis, Tennessee to support a sanitation workers' strike. That evening he gives his 'Mountaintop' speech.

1968

The day after his 'Mountaintop' speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis by James Earl Ray. The murder precipitates unrest in 100 cities.

The Civil Rights Act of 1968 is signed by President Johnson. The law prohibits discrimination on the grounds of “race, color, religion, or national origin, handicap or familial status”.

Shirley Chisholm of New York is the first Black woman to be elected to the House of Representatives. She goes on to serve for seven terms and compete in the Democratic presidential primaries.

1969

Maya Angelou publishes her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

1971

Richard Nixon declares a ‘War on Drugs,’ meant to disrupt Black communities and anti-war activists. The policy, over the next three decades, leads to a great increase in the prison population and is used to justify political intervention in Latin America.

1972

George Robert Carruthers, an African-American physicist, invents the Far Ultraviolet Camera / Spectrograph for NASA to use on the Apollo 16 mission.

Civil rights activist Andrew Young is elected to Congress as the representative for Georgia, going on to serve as Permanent Representative to the United Nations and Mayor of Atlanta.

1977

Alex Haley’s *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* wins the Pulitzer Prize.

Black Folk Art in America 1930–1980 at the Corcoran Gallery Washington DC includes artists William Edmondson, Nellie Mae Rowe, James Son Ford Thomas and Bill Traylor.

1979

Artist Nellie Mae Rowe has a solo exhibition at Parsons-Dreyfuss Gallery, New York.

Richard Arrington, Jr. is elected the first African-American mayor of Birmingham, Alabama.

1983

Alice Walker, wins the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for her novel *The Color Purple*.

1991

The United States invades Iraq.

1992

Willie W. Herenton is elected the first African-American mayor of Memphis, Tennessee.

A California jury acquits four white police officers charged with the brutal assault of Rodney King, precipitating riots in Los Angeles. The civil unrest lasts for three days and results in the deaths of around 60 people and 7,000 arrests.

1993

Thornton Dial's exhibition and book *Image of the Tiger* at the New Museum / American Folk Art Museum. Curated by Thomas McEvilley; essay by Amiri Baraka.

Toni Morrison wins the Nobel Prize for Literature, after winning the Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved* in 1987.

1997

The Million Woman March takes place in Philadelphia—an estimated 750,000 women are reported to have attended.

2001

Condoleeza Rice, born in Birmingham, Alabama, becomes the first woman to be appointed National Security Advisor, and in 2005 she would be appointed to the position of Secretary of State.

Colin Powell is appointed as the first Black Secretary of State.

In the aftermath of terror attacks on September 11th, the U.S experiences a political shift which includes a scaling back of civil liberties and heightened Islamophobia in the newly-coined “War on Terror.”

2002

The Quilts of Gee’s Bend, first major museum exhibition of the quilts at Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and Whitney Museum of American Art.

2003

The United States invades Iraq and Afghanistan.

Artist Lonnie Holley has a major solo exhibition at Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, Alabama and Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK.

2005

Thornton Dial has a major solo exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

2008

Barack Obama is elected as the first Black President of the United States.

2014

Thornton Dial, Lonnie Holley and James ‘Son Ford’ Thomas participate in *When the Stars Begin to Fall: Imagination and the American South* at The Studio Museum in Harlem.

2015

In the wake of the increasing visibility of arbitrary police killings of Black people, the Movement for Black Lives is founded as a political and social collective to mobilise against systemic racism in the United States and abroad. The Black Lives Matter movement forms.

2016

Thornton Dial is included in Southern Accent: Seeking the American South in Contemporary Art at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University.

2017

Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power is exhibited at Tate Modern in London.

2018

Mary Lee Bendolph, William Edmondson, Lonnie Holley, James 'Son Ford' Thomas, Bill Traylor and Annie Mae Young are included in Outliers and American Vanguard Art at the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art accepts over fifty works of art from Souls Grown Deep Foundation. They are exhibited in History Refused to Die: Highlights from the Souls Grown Deep Foundation Gift.

The National Memorial for Peace and Justice is established in Montgomery, Alabama by the Equal Justice Initiative to commemorate the victims of American lynching.

2019

Montgomery, Alabama elects Steven Reed as its first African-American mayor.

The Emmett Till memorial is replaced by a bullet proof version after being repeatedly vandalised.

The wreck of the Clotilda, the last known U.S. slave ship to bring captives from Africa to the United States, is recovered from Mobile Bay in Alabama. The people illegally imported as slaves on the Clotilda founded the community of Africatown in north Mobile.

Hannah Collins

Joe Minter's monument to incarcerations during
Civil Rights demonstrations in Birmingham

Silver Gelatin prints

2019

Courtesy Hannah Collins