

NOW DIG THIS! ART AND BLACK LOS ANGELES 1960-1980 AT MoMA PS1

Exhibition chronicles the vital legacy of the African American artistic community in Los Angeles, bringing together 140 works by 33 artists

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October 21, 2012 – March 11, 2013

1st floor, MoMA PS1

(Long Island City, NY—May 2, 2012) MoMA PS1 presents ***Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960–1980***, a comprehensive exhibition that chronicles the vital legacy of the African American artistic community in Los Angeles, examining a pioneering group of black artists whose work, connections, and friendships with other artists of varied ethnic backgrounds helped shape the creative output of Southern California. *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960-1980* will be on view in the First Floor Main galleries at MoMA PS1 from October 21, 2012 through March 11, 2013.

Now Dig This! is organized by the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and was presented there in 2011-12 as part of Pacific Standard Time, a collaboration of more than sixty cultural institutions across Southern California. The exhibition is curated by Kellie Jones, Associate Professor in the Department of Art History and Archaeology, Columbia University, and the presentation at MoMA PS1 is organized at MoMA PS1 by Christophe Cherix, The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Chief Curator of Prints and Illustrated Books, The Museum of Modern Art, and Peter Eleey, Curator, MoMA PS1, in association with Connie Butler, The Robert Lehman Foundation Chief Curator of Drawings, the Museum of Modern Art.

The exhibition presents 140 works by thirty-three artists active during this historical period, exploring the rising strength of the black community in Los Angeles as well as the increasing political, social, and economic power of African Americans across the nation. Several prominent artists began their careers in the Los Angeles area, including Melvin Edwards, David Hammons, Maren Hassinger, Senga Nengudi, John Outterbridge, Noah Purifoy, and Betye Saar. Their influence, like that of all the artists in the exhibition, goes beyond their immediate creative circles and the geography of Los Angeles and is critical to a more complete and dynamic understanding of twentieth-century American art.

By illuminating the richness and complexity of this creative community, *Now Dig This!* demonstrates how these artists were not working in isolation but were instead integral to the developing U.S. art scene during the latter part of the twentieth century. During this important era of artistic and cultural ferment, artists shifted from more traditional formats, such as painting and works on paper, to modes such as assemblage, Finish Fetish (a West Coast movement parallel to Minimal Art on the East Coast), Postminimal Art, Conceptual Art, and performance.

EXHIBITION DESCRIPTION

Presented in MoMA PS1's First Floor Main galleries, *Now Dig This!* looks at the period through several framing categories.

FRONT RUNNERS — By the early 1960s the West Coast became highly visible among the international arts community. African American artists such as Betye Saar and Melvin Edwards made some of their earliest important works during this time. Charles White, a veteran social realist from Chicago, arrived in Los Angeles from New York in 1956, energizing the black art community and inspiring many young artists who studied under him at Otis Art Institute.

ASSEMBLING — The Watts Rebellion of 1965 was the largest urban riot at that time in U.S. history and had a profound effect on this community of artists. Many began to approach their craft and materials differently, and assemblage emerged as an important artistic strategy. Noah Purifoy and John T. Riddle, for example, made assemblage works from the detritus of the Watts Rebellion, creating formally impressive pieces that were also highly charged politically. Purifoy claimed that it was the Rebellion that made him a real artist.

ARTISTS/GALLERISTS — Lacking representation in mainstream institutions, African American artists opened their own venues in the 1960s and 70s. Spaces such as Gallery 32, founded by painter Suzanne Jackson, and the Brockman Gallery—established by brothers Dale and Alonzo Davis, became sites for cutting-edge work and havens for discussions, poetry readings, and fund-raisers for social causes. Samella Lewis is an amazing one-woman institution, having opened several galleries and a museum, started a magazine, and published some of the earliest books on this cohort of artists.

POSTMINIMAL ART AND PERFORMANCE — This section of the exhibition documents the move away from more didactic subject matter toward abstract and dematerialized practices. Fred Eversley was the most visible African American working with the Finish Fetish style of Los Angeles Minimal Art in the 1960s. In the 1970s artists such as Senga Nengudi, Maren Hassinger, and David Hammons began to experiment with PostMinimal Art ephemerality, and performance.

LOS ANGELES SNAPSHOT / FRIENDS — The exhibition also explores the informal relationships between African American artists in Los Angeles and those in Northern California, like Raymond Saunders, as well as artists of varied ethnic backgrounds, such as Virginia Jaramillo, Ron Miyashiro, and Mark di Suvero. These relationships are an important part of fully understanding and contextualizing the work of this generation.

FEATURED ARTISTS

Sister Karen Bocalero, Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, Marie Johnson Calloway, George Clack, Dan Concholar, Houston Conwill, Jayne Cortez, Alonzo Davis, Dale Brockman Davis, Melvin Edwards, Fred Eversley, Charles Gaines, David Hammons, Maren Hassinger, Suzanne Jackson, Virginia Jaramillo, Ulysses Jenkins, Daniel LaRue Johnson, Elizabeth Leigh-Taylor, Samella Lewis, Ron Miyashiro, Senga Nengudi, John Outterbridge, William Pajaud, Noah Purifoy, John T. Riddle, Betye Saar, Raymond Saunders, Mark di Suvero, Ruth Waddy, Charles White, Tyrus Wong, and Andrew Zermeno.

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The presentation at MoMA PS1 is made possible by MoMA's Wallis Annenberg Fund for Innovation in Contemporary Art through the Annenberg Foundation.

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The accompanying symposium at MoMA is supported in part by the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University.

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Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, which funded a Curatorial Research Fellowship; and The Broad Art Foundation.

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For downloadable high-resolution images, register at MoMA.org/press.

Hours:

MoMA PS1 is open from 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., Thursday through Monday. It is closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. artbook@MoMA PS1 is open from 1:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., Thursday through Sunday.

Admission:

\$10 suggested donation; \$5 for students and senior citizens; free for MoMA members and MoMA admission ticket holders. The MoMA ticket must be presented at MoMA PS1 within thirty days of date on ticket and is not valid during Warm Up or other MoMA PS1 events or benefits.

Directions:

MoMA PS1 is located at 22-25 Jackson Avenue at 46th Ave in Long Island City, Queens, across the Queensboro Bridge from midtown Manhattan and is easily accessible by bus and subway. Traveling by subway, take either the E or M to Court Square-23 Street; the 7 to 45 Road-Courthouse Square; or the G to Court Sq or 21 St-Van Alst. By bus, take the Q67 to Jackson and 46th Ave or the B62 to 46th Ave.

MoMA PS1 Background:

MoMA PS1 is one of the largest and oldest organizations in the United States devoted to contemporary art. Established in 1976 by Alanna Heiss, MoMA PS1 originated from The Institute for Art and Urban Resources, a not-for-profit organization founded five years prior with the mission of turning abandoned, underutilized buildings in New York City into artist studios and exhibition spaces. P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, as it then was known, became an affiliate of The Museum of Modern Art in 2000.

Support:

Operations and programs of MoMA PS1 are supported by the MoMA PS1 Board of Directors; the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; Helen M. Marshall, Queens Borough President; Council Member James Van Bramer; The Council of the City of New York; and the MoMA PS1 Annual Fund, Annual Exhibition Fund, and The Student Body. The MoMA PS1 Annual Fund is supported by The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, Union Beer Distributors, Susan G. Jacoby, Mathis Pfohl Foundation, Christina Dalle Pezze, Jane K. Lombard, Andrew Edlin Gallery, Marian Goodman Gallery, Saks Fifth Avenue, and other donors.