

PRESS RELEASE

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On July 20 WCMA will Welcome the Public to
Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960–1980

July 20–December 1, 2013

Images available upon request.

Press Contact: Kim Hugo, Public Relations Coordinator;
(413) 597-3352; Kim.M.Hugo@williams.edu

Williamstown, Mass. – The Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) is pleased to present the exhibition *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960–1980*. On view from July 20 to December 1, 2013, *Now Dig This!* chronicles the vital legacy of the African American arts community in Los Angeles, examining a pioneering group of black artists whose work and connections with other artists helped shape the creative output of Southern California. The exhibition of 130 works by 33 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. The exhibition offers a broader view of the changing art landscape during this important era of artistic and cultural foment, as artists shifted from more traditional formats such as painting and works on paper to modes such as assemblage, Finish Fetish (a West Coast style of Minimalism), PostMinimalism, Conceptualism, and performance. The exhibition includes a range of materials including sculpture, mixed media assemblage, painting, prints, collage, video, ephemera documentation, and a series of works commissioned on occasion of the exhibition. Artists featured in the exhibition include Melvin Edwards, Fred Eversley, David Hammons, Maren Hassinger, Senga Nengudi, John Outterbridge, Alonzo Davis, Dale Brockman Davis, Noah Purifoy, Betye Saar, and Charles White.

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 WCMA is organized by Kathryn Price, Curator of Special Projects. *Now Dig This!* was awarded Best Thematic Exhibit Nationally for 2012 by the International Association of Art Critics (AICA).

"The artists that have been included in *Now Dig This!* represent a vibrant group whose work is critical to a more complete and dynamic understanding of twentieth century American art. Their influence goes beyond their immediate creative circles and their legacy is something we are only now beginning to fully understand," says exhibition curator Kellie Jones.

"We are thrilled to bring *Now Dig This!* to the region," says Christina Olsen, Class of '56 Director of the Williams College Museum of Art. "It offers an incredibly rich and vital canvas for the faculty and students interested in contemporary art, music, and dance, civil rights movement and more to explore and learn."

WCMA has a long tradition of collecting work by artists from Los Angeles and will feature those strong holdings for the first time in *72 Degrees: LA Art from the Collection*. On view from August 17 to December 1, 2013, the exhibition will include sculpture, assemblage, prints, and photographs from the 1960s and 1970s.

Exhibition Description

The *Now Dig This!* exhibition is organized into 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 Mel Edwards made some of their earliest important works at 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. **Front Runners: Melvin Edwards, William Pajaud, Betye Saar and Charles White.**

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. **Assembling: Daniel Larue Johnson, John Outterbridge, Noah Purifoy, John Riddle, and Betye Saar.**

Artists/Gallerists -- Lacking representation in mainstream institutions, African American artists opened their own venues in the 1960s and 1970s. 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 was 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.

Artists/Gallerists: Alonzo Davis, Dale Brockman Davis, Suzanne Jackson, and Samella Lewis.

Post/Minimalism 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 ephemerality and performance. **Post/Minimalism and Performance: Fred Eversley, David Hammons, Maren Hassinger, Ulysses Jenkins, and Senga Nengudi.**

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.

Friends: Karen Boccalero, Mark Di Suvero, Charles Gaines, Virginia Jaramillo, Marie Johnson Calloway, Houston Conwill, Elizabeth Leigh-Taylor, Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, Ron Miyashiro, Joe Overstreet, Raymond Saunders, Gordon Wagner, Tyrus Wong, and Andrew Zermeno.

Catalogue

A 350 page full-color catalogue accompanies the exhibition, co-published by Delmonico/Prestel and the Hammer Museum. The publication includes reproductions of works included in the exhibition supplemented by scholarly essays, a comprehensive

bibliography, and reproductions of archival materials, including posters, invitations, documentary photographs, and other items recently uncovered.

About the Curator

Now Dig This! is curated by Kellie Jones, associate professor in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University. Jones's writings have appeared in numerous exhibition catalogues and publications including *NKA*, *Artforum*, *Flash Art*, *Atlantica*, and *Third Text*. Most recently, she curated *Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964–1980* (The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2006). Current book projects include, *EyeMinded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art* (Duke University Press 2011) and *Taming the Freeway and Other Acts of Urban HIP-notism: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* (forthcoming from The MIT Press).

Special Thanks

Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960–1980 was organized by the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. The exhibition was made possible by major grants from the Getty Foundation. Generous support has been provided by the Henry Luce Foundation; the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, which funded a Curatorial Research Fellowship; and The Broad Art Foundation.

Related Programming

Free public programs and performances will accompany the exhibition.

Opening Day

Saturday, July 20 from 2:00 p.m.

Get a first glimpse of *Now Dig This!* with Kellie Jones, exhibition curator and associate professor in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University.

The Actors Intervene

Thursday, July 25 and August 8 at 4:00 and 6:00 p.m.

See what happens when Williamstown Theatre Festival actors mine *Now Dig This!* for inspiration, and animate the galleries with an artful performance.

Artist Senga Nengudi to deliver the Annual Plonsker Family Lecture in Contemporary Art

Saturday, November 2 at 3:00 p.m.

The Williams College Museum of Art

The Williams College Museum of Art is located on Main Street in Williamstown, Massachusetts. It is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. From July 20 through Labor Day the museum will be open every day from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The museum is wheelchair accessible and open to the public. Admission is FREE. For more information, contact the museum at (413) 597-2429 or visit wcma.williams.edu.

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