

## Contemporary Black Artists and Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory, sometimes called CRT, is a response to systemic racism in the United States and beyond. CRT includes the authors, artists, activists, and theorists who have offered new ways to understand race as both a social construction and a lived experience. Art has always been an avenue for resistance, joy, self-expression, representation, healing, and revolution for those who experience racial oppression. SU Art holds a robust collection of works that showcase the incredible talents of Black artists (both historical and contemporary) and offer visual examples for critical race theories. With faith in the teaching value of visual art, this module highlights contemporary Black artists in the United States. Each work is paired with suggested readings, theories, and/or theorists on race. Not only will the works help students visualize, remember, and understand theoretical concepts, but the aesthetic encounter will grant power and volume to the voices of predominately young, Black artists.

Both the artworks and readings are suggestions that can be modified to a specific course or learning outcome(s). Artists and theorists are often multivalent, and as such, they can and should be interpreted through various lenses and contexts. Please reach out to (INSERT EMAIL) to discuss any changes or adaptations.



**Object #** 2020.0027

**Title:** [Portrait of a Black man with American flag partially covering his face]

**Artist:** Rog & Bee Walker

**Medium:** Inkjet archival pigment

**Dimensions:** 9 x 9 in.

**Date:** 2020

Rog and Bee Walker, part of the See in Black project, are a married couple based out of NYC. They specialize in editorial photography, studio portraiture, commercial campaigns, and documentary coverage. They explore concepts of identity, family, history, and storytelling. The two have now

photographed for HBO, Google, *The New York Times*, Pharrell Williams, Kevin Durant, and LeBron James.

### **Suggested text(s):**

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2014.

Hughes, Langston. "I, Too." *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. Ed. Rampersad, Arnold and David E Roessel. Knopf, New York, 1994. 65.



**Object #** 2020.0020

**Title:** [Photomontage of a Civil War era Black soldier holding pistol]

**Artist:** Aaron Turner (American, born 1990)

**Medium:** Inkjet archival pigment

**Date:** 2020

Aaron Turner, part of the See in Black project, is currently based out of Arkansas, where he works as a photographer and educator. His photography aims to tell the personal stories of people of color in the Arkansas and Mississippi Deltas. He is currently working to develop the Center for Photographers of Color at the School of Art within the University of Arkansas. His work and research interests include photography as a transformative process to think through place, identity, abstraction, and aggregation. This photograph bridges

American history with geometric abstraction and individual perspective.

**Suggested text:**

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Ed. Jonathan S. Holloway. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 2015.



**Object #** 2020.0034

**Title:** Black Warrior Mask

**Artist:** Allison Janae Hamilton (American, born 1984)

**Medium:** Vintage fencing mask, upholstery tacks, and resin

**Dimensions:** 9 x 8 x 8 in.

**Date:** 2020

Allison Janae Hamilton works in sculpture, installation, photography, and video arts. She received a PhD in American Studies from New York University and an MFA in Visual Arts from Columbia University. Hamilton and her work is inspired by landscapes and environments, particularly those of the American south. Her haunting, mythic art engages issues such as land loss, environmental justice, climate change,

and sustainability. The warrior masks are a meditation on the fencing masks that Black soldiers wore in World War II, when they fought for the country that oppressed them. *Black Warrior Mask* is one example of the material objects that enter her imaginative installations in which she creates an environment and unfolds historical and contemporary narratives.

**Suggested reading(s):**

Hartman, Saidiya. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe*, vol. 12 no. 2, 2008, p. 1-14.

McGuire, Phillip. *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II*. ABC-Clío, Santa Barbara, Calif, 1983.



**Object #** 2020.0089

**Title:** Nou Fé Pati, Nou Se, Nou Avi (We Belong, We Be, We Long)

**Artist:** Widline Cadet (Haitian, born 1992)

**Medium:** Archival pigment print

**Dimensions:** 32 x 40 in.

**Date:** 2020

Widline Cadet is a Haitian-born American artist who works in photography, videography, and installation. Cadet earned her MFA from Syracuse University. Her practice utilizes personal history to examine race,

memory, erasure, migration, immigration, and Haitian cultural identity in the United States. Her work explores notions of visibility and hyper-visibility, Black feminine interiority, and selfhood.

### **Suggested Reading:**

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (1991): 1241-99.



**Object #** 2020.0019

**Title:** [Black Lives Matter protest, man standing with his left fist raised]

**Artist:** Flo Ngala (American, born 1995)

**Medium:** Inkjet archival pigment

**Dimensions:** 7 3/4 x 11 in.

**Date:** 2020

Flo Ngala is a contemporary Black photographer and photojournalist based out of New York. She was born and raised in vibrant Harlem to a West African family, and her photography and photojournalism has recently taken off. She traveled with Gucci Mane and Cardi B, and her intimate portraits of the two musicians launched her rising career. She has since worked with Facebook, Netflix, *The New York Times*, and *GQ*. Her images, like this photograph from a Black Lives Matter protest, seek to create "powerful moments with people" while always maintaining her artistic integrity. She captured a number of such moments during protests in the wake of George Floyd's murder in the summer of 2020.

### **Suggested Reading:**

Taylor, Keeanga. *From #blacklivesmatter to Black Liberation*. Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2016.



**Object # 2020.0023**

**Title:** [Portrait of two young Black woman wearing large hooped earrings]

**Artist:** Makeda Sandford (American)

**Medium:** Photography, Inkjet archival pigment

**Dimensions:**

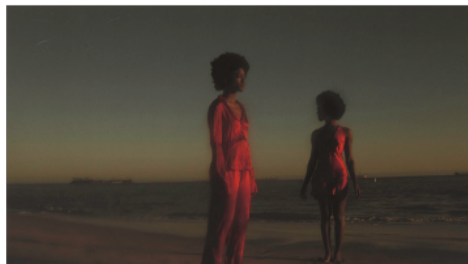
**Date:** 2020

Makeda Sandford, part of the See in Black project, is a photographer and creative director based out of Brooklyn, NY. She writes freelance, is a social media specialist, and has dabbled in the film industry. Her work is interested in intersecting identity, femininity, fashion, beauty, youth, and the Black American and African diaspora, all of which is apparent in

this portrait.

**Suggested text:**

Walker, Alice. *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, San Diego, 1983.



**Object # 2020.0025**

**Title:** [Two young black women standing apart on beach at twilight, both are wearing orange/red garments]

**Artist:** Rikki Wright (American, active 21<sup>st</sup> century)

**Medium:** Inkjet archival pigment

**Dimensions:** 7 3/4 x 12 in.

**Date:** 2020

Rikki Wright works out of Los Angeles as a freelance photographer. She self-describes her work as warm in tone, lighting, and subject. Wright attempts to capture authentic moments, and she does so by encouraging her subjects to be themselves. She is currently working on a documentary that explores Southern food, family, and remembrance. This photograph meditates on the experience of waiting via soft tones, minimal environmental backdrop, and striking red satin.

**Suggested reading:**

Sharpe, Christina E. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham, NC: Duke UP. 2016.



**Object #** 2009.0113.1

**Title:** Singing Their Songs

**Artist:** Elizabeth Catlett (American, 1915-2012)

**Medium:** Color Lithograph

**Dimensions:** 16 1/4 × 13 5/8 in.

**Date:** 1992

Elizabeth Catlett was an American-born Mexican sculptor and graphic artist. She is known for her work on the (female) Black-American experience of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. Her grandparents were freed slaves. Catlett shattered many glass ceilings for Black and female artists. When awarded a fellowship, she moved to Mexico City to head the sculpture department at the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas. Her

work is best described as social realism. She was most interested in race, class, and gender. *Singing Their Songs* is one of six illustrative lithographs for Margaret Walker's *For My People*. Walker and Catlett were roommates during graduate school at the University of Iowa.

**Suggested reading(s):**

Walker, Margaret. "For My People." *For My People*, ed. Stephen Vincent Benet, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1989, pp. 13–14.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "The Case for Reparations." *The Atlantic*, June 2014.



**Object #** 2020.0024

**Title:** Untitled 13, Groveland Park, IL 2016

**Artist:** Jon Henry (American)

**Medium:** Photography, Inkjet archival pigment

**Dimensions:** 10 x 8 in.

**Date:** 2020

**Suggested reading(s):**

Jon Henry, originally from Queens, NY, works with photography and text. He was recently named one of the *TIME* Magazine's TIME100 Next for 2021. His work reflects on family, sociopolitical issues, grief, trauma, and healing in the African American community. This photograph is part of his

*Stranger Fruit* series, in which sons pose with their mothers as if they were dead. He recreates scenes of mourning to emphasize the long-term pain of police violence.

Craddock, Karen T. *Black Motherhood(s): Contours, Contexts and Considerations*. Demeter Press: Bradford, ON, 2015.





**Object #** 2020.0029

**Title:** Erratic Eyes (from the “Transformation” series)

**Artist:** Ivan Forde (Guyanese-American, born 1990)

**Medium:** digital inkjet print collage

**Dimensions:** 13 1/2 x 12 1/4 in.

**Date:** 2012

Ivan Forde is a Guyanese-American artist who works with photography, printmaking, digital animation, sound performance, and installation. His work retells stories from epic poetry by meditating on character, casting himself in the narrative, and contemplating migration, memory, and homeland. He brings

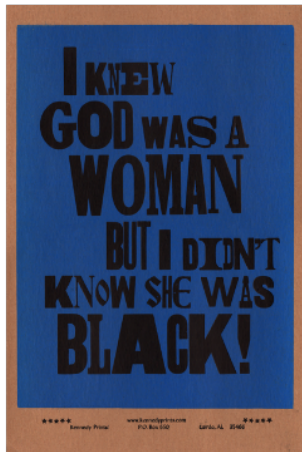
modern sociopolitical subtext to ancient texts, and his products dabble in the world of science fiction and surrealism. His “Transformation” series is based on the reading experience of John Milton’s 17<sup>th</sup>-century allegory *Paradise Lost*.

**Suggested text(s):**

Theorists and readings on Afro-futurism.

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. Vintage Books, New York, 1980.

Hurston, Zora N. *Their Eyes were Watching God: A Novel*. Perennial Library, New York, 1990.



**Object #** 2011.0247

**Title:** I know GOD was a WOMAN but I didn’t know she was BLACK!

**Artist:** Amos Paul Kennedy (American, born 1950)

**Medium:** letterpress relief

**Date:** n.d.

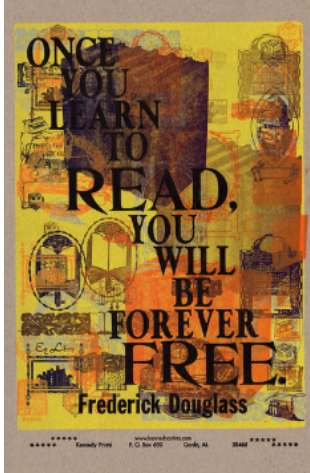
Amos Paul Kennedy, a Black contemporary printer, book artist, and papermaker, is known widely for his posters that offer social and political commentary. He emphasizes questions that spur discomfort and reflection about, among other topics, race, politics, and artistic pretentiousness. He began printmaking at age forty after visiting an 18<sup>th</sup>-century print shop at a Virginian living history museum. He describes his fascination with the

letterpress as inherently tied to making multiples, which allows for wide distribution. Like much of his work, this poster employs bold colors and typeface to make a strong, political, theological, and social statement.

**Suggested text(s):**

Writings on Black Feminist and/or Womanist Theology.

Sanders, Cheryl J et al. "Roundtable Discussion: Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1989, pp. 83-112.



**Object #** 2011.0222

**Title:** Once You Learn To READ, You Will Be Forever FREE – Douglass

**Artist:** Amos Paul Kennedy (American, born 1950)

**Medium:** letterpress relief

**Dimensions:** Object: 16 7/8 × 11 1/2 in. (42.9 × 29.2 cm) Sheet: 19 1/2 × 12 1/2 in. (49.5 × 31.7 cm)

**Date:** n.d.

Kennedy here quotes Frederick Douglass, and overlays text and image. Here he seems to interrogate, or perhaps redefine, reading itself in relation to freedom.

**Suggested reading:**

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2009.



**Object #** 2020.0018

**Title:** Aria

**Artist:** Braylen Dion (American, born circa 2000)

**Medium:** Inkjet archival pigment

**Dimensions:** 8 x 10 in.

**Date:** 2020

Artist: Braylen Dion is a contemporary photographer and filmmaker based out of NYC and Atlanta, GA. At just twenty-one years old, he aims to rectify and revitalize representations of

Black people in the media by capturing intimacy, warmth, and softness. His art has recently been published in *The New York Times*, *Vanity Fair*, *Business Week*, *BET*, and more, and he has collaborated with Sprite, Nike, AFROPUNK, and Sony music. *Aria* (2020) features a young child, arms raised, supported by a parent's hands. It suggests innocence and protection. Like much of his work, this photograph exemplifies beauty, surrender, love, and growth.

**Suggested reading:**

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, New York, 2007



**Object #** 2020.0017

**Title:** Reflection

**Artist:** Kreshonna Keane (American, born 1995)

**Medium:** Photography, Inkjet archival pigment

**Dimensions:** 10 x 8 in.

**Date:** March 15, 2020

**Suggested reading(s):**

Kreshonna Keane is a New York based portrait photographer and director. Her work exposes juxtapositions between her subjects and their environment, addresses social stigmas, highlights culture, and celebrates life. *Reflection* showcases an aspiring musician who blends

Hip-Hop, R&B, Reggae, and Afro beat sounds.

**Suggested Reading(s):**

Maultsby, Portia K., and Burnim, Mellonee V. *Issues in African American Music: Power, Gender, Race, Representation*. Eds. Portia Maultsby and Mellonee Burnim. Routledge, 2016.

Watkins, S. Craig (Samuel Craig). *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement*. Beacon Press, Boston, 2005.

Note: Most of the works in this module are part of the See in Black project in the Vol. 001 - Black in America series. The works were purchased from a collective of Black photographers that formed to dismantle white supremacy and systematic oppression. The SIB project launched in 2020 in response to the deaths of Black people at the hands of law enforcement. Through the sale of highly-curated original images from Black photographers, SIB raises funds to support causes that align with a vision of Black prosperity and organizations that work to dismantle systemic, race-based oppression.

Works included: [Portrait of a Black man with American flag partially covering his face], [Photomontage of a Civil War era Black soldier holding pistol], [Black Lives Matter protest, man standing with his left fist raised], [Black Lives Matter protest, man standing with his left fist raised], [Two young black women standing apart on beach at twilight, both are wearing orange/red garments], Untitled 13, Groveland Park, IL 2016, Aria, and Reflection.