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Anthony L. Treadaway

DePauw University, atreadaway_2022@depauw.edu

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Public Art In The United States By Black Artists (1980s - Present)

Anthony Treadaway

DePauw University

Author Note

Anthony L. Treadaway, Honor Scholar Department, DePauw University.

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Communication concerning this article should be addressed to Anthony Treadaway, Honor Scholar Department, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN 46135.

Contact: atreadaway_2022@depauw.edu

Abstract

The purpose of this project is to do further research on public art created by Black artists and to explore how their work has created change by looking through the lens of the specific mural and sculpture exhibits. I will be specifically focusing on artworks and artists from the early 1980s to the present day. In the end, this piece offers insight into the importance of public art in our diverse communities. Public art serves as a form of representation and historically Black voices have been silenced in this arena. The stakes of increasing the amount of public art that showcases Black people and communities is crucial in a day of age where tokenism has become celebrated. My research is meant to highlight this gap by not only showcasing Black artists that have been doing the work for years (well-known & lesser-known names) but also putting them into conversation with each other. Drawing these connections will provide answers and insight to questions I have contemplated throughout my public art journey from middle school to college. Get your notebooks and pens ready as this accelerated course on public art created by Black artists filled with connections and reflections will be quite the experience!

Keywords: Black Artists, Blackness, Community, Politics of Representation, Public Art

Introduction

It's a sunny afternoon in mid-April in New York City and you decide to go outside for your lunch break. On your walk across the High Line to get to your favorite lunch spot you look up and see an enormous 16-foot-tall bronze sculpture of a Black woman. You stop in your tracks and are immediately sent down a rabbit hole of questions: Who created this sculpture? What is its purpose? Is it meant to commemorate an important figure? Being so large, how did it even get here? This scenario referencing [Brick House \(2019\)](#) by Simone Leigh is a testament to why public art is so powerful and important. Its accessibility and size make it impossible to ignore and such a great conversation starter that allows for reflection. This project examines public art created by Black artists in the United States and the importance of their works in creating opportunities for greater representation of Black people in The United States. The purpose of this project is to do further research on public art created by Black artists and to explore how their work has created change by looking through the lens of the specific mural and sculpture exhibits. The central question guiding this research is: How are the politics of representation and Blackness explored in public art?

Considering the enormous amount of history that falls into public art created by Black artists, this research will encompass a more streamlined approach. Really just prioritizing 8 key artists and works. With each work, significant time will be spent truly understanding their purpose and impact. I have had a passion for public art throughout my upbringing and will share these specific experiences as they have shaped my understanding of what public art involves. Furthermore, my experiences have led me to create this project to attempt to answer some unsolved questions regarding representation. Forewarning whether you're an avid art connoisseur or just enjoy learning about artists this piece is accessible to all backgrounds. I look forward to

not only teaching myself through this journey but also having you all as readers learn a thing or two as well.

Personal Background

Growing up I vividly remember driving around Tallahassee, Florida for hours with my grandfather who is an avid photographer. We would stop at murals, sculptures, and museums to take pictures and learn about the local art and history. Looking back I now recognize my interest in public art emerged out of these early experiences. After middle school, I moved to a new city every few years and each city offered me the opportunity to learn about different artists. In each new city, I experienced public art serving as an informal educational outlet. I became oriented to the intricacies of the different communities within the cities. Researching the artists from these respective communities and learning about their public art taught me the history of each city. Three cities, in particular, stand out as places where my love for public art flourished: Charlotte, North Carolina; Raleigh, North Carolina; and Lansing, Michigan.

The first stop was Charlotte, North Carolina where I was exposed to tons of public art, ranging from sculptures to murals and even graffiti. Just to name a few: *The Firebird* by French-American sculptor Niki de Saint Phalle, *Metalmorphosis* by Czech artist David Cerny, *NoDa* mural by William Puckett, and *Grande Disco* by Italian artist Arnaldo Pomodoro. My second stop was Raleigh, North Carolina where I had my first encounter with academic art history in my AP Art History high school course. I also explored public art at the North Carolina Museum of Art practically every chance. I even went to the yearly Raleigh Chalk Art Festival in my one-year stay. My third stop was Lansing, Michigan where I was a summer intern at Lansing Art Gallery. Over the summer I helped with the yearly public art event ARTpath2019. My main role involved assisting artist Mia Serafini with her mural installation under one of the major

bridges across the river trail. The piece was titled [Community Growth](#) and in its core was a paint by numbers piece. It was in this experience I really understood the power of public art within its respective communities.

Reflecting back on these three major stops in my public art journey I begin to notice a trend. Practically none of the artworks that I saw in these major cities were by artists who looked like me. That epiphany is what led me to take up this specific topic for my research thesis to fill that gap in my studies. With the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in cities across the United States during COVID-19 I began to see many Black artists creating public art ranging from sculptures to street murals. Overall this shift has provided greater recognition of artwork created by Black artists. In my junior year of college while home in Charlotte, North Carolina I witnessed an influx of these [works](#) being highlighted. I started to connect all of the dots from a lack of exposure to Black artists in my coursework to community influence in my internship and even the political aspect of public art in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement. These three key takeaways have inspired me to explore the politics of representation and blackness within public art.

One recent example that has stuck out to me is [Rock It Black \(2021\)](#) by Tanda Francis, part of the plywood-repurposing public art installation project in collaboration with worthless studios.¹ Tanda describes her work as “Undoing the stigmatization of blackness by presenting black identities as divine and as a foundation to our shared humanity.”² Years into the Black

¹ Matt Hickman, *Five protest plywood-repurposing public art installations are now on view across New York City* (The Architects Paper, 2021) <https://www.archpaper.com/2021/05/five-protest-plywood-protection-project-on-display-nyc/>

² Tanda Francis, *Rock It Black* (Artist Website, 2021) <https://www.tandafrancis.com/rockitblack-portfolio>

Lives Matter Movement works by Black artists like Tasha Francis are still being created to show the world the beauty and importance of our people.

Key Terms Defined/History of public art

The idea of public art is a rather large idea, referring to any artwork that is designed for a setting that is accessible to the general public. Many works while forms of public art may not necessarily be in the public's eye. A more relevant definition would be the concept of any public artwork that was supported by public funding that is situated within an open environment.³ The open environment being within pedestrian areas, plazas, urban centers or public buildings. These works are important because they spark conversations in communities and add a sense of energy and liveliness to their respective neighborhoods.

Drawing some interdisciplinary connections to my previous coursework, I find some overlap with the power of community art and philosopher Albert Camus. In my Existential Literature course, I studied how he was fascinated by the notion of art being an act of rebellion and a medium in which revolution can take place. After all, the famous saying “all art is political” is a testament to this idea of power within art and the capability of it sparking change. Author Diana Boros eloquently explains this power of art in her book *Creative Rebellion for the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Public and Interactive Art to Political Life in America*. Boros argues that, “Visionary, or “rebellious” art, following Camus, is fundamentally transgressive; it is a negation of the “established reality.”⁴ She also explains that in reorganizing and newly envisioning the world, art provides, for the creator and the viewer, contemplation of oneself, and of life. Within this reflection lies great potential for new viewpoints and behaviors to

³ *Public Art: Definition, History, Types* (Visual Arts Cork, n.d.)
<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/public-art.htm>

⁴ Diana, Boros, “*Creative rebellion for the twenty-first century: The importance of public and interactive art to ... political life in America*” (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.21.

form within the self that challenge accepted ideas and create new possibilities.”⁵ To connect this to my definition of public art, I see this idea of envisioning the world and its tendency to create moments of reflection intriguing. Boros does a great job showcasing that the mere exposure to public art in our communities has an intrinsic power.

While I do think all art has power... I find that public art is in its own arena. Being that the works are located within our everyday (plazas, buildings, and pedestrian areas) versus the “traditional” (indoor museum) they offer greater accessibility. Furthermore, when one engages with a mural for instance on a wall in their community there is a stronger connection. It is almost more tangible in that the ideas explored in the work could become a reality in our everyday lives. If a depiction of the themes are already laid out in one’s community the only next step is to begin to make those depictions a reality. This idea is something I believe to be the central theme in many of the works created by the artists I analyze. While some may be attempting to spark conversations on super dense questions of lack of representation from the foundation of this nation others just want to shine a light on the beauty of Blackness to inspire the youth. Within this spectrum of purpose there is a fundamental power of public art by Black artists in sparking reflection and especially questions of representation. Another aspect that makes public art powerful is its sheer size. Many of the works I will be discussing, simply cannot be ignored. While someone’s privilege may afford them the opportunity to ignore the struggle’s another person faces, a sculpture that is 27 feet high by 16 feet wide will force someone to engage. This massive size is what makes public art so powerful. It quite literally inserts itself into the everyday life of an individual, despite their beliefs or background. Conversely an art gallery where someone would have to actively go out of their way to see the art. I am so interested in

⁵ Boros, *Creative rebellion*, p.156

public art because of this difference. When I think of representation in the art world and what medium can inspire change in communities most successfully I am led to public art.

Glancing through the long history of public art there are five key styles of public art that stand out. Political art, land-based art, architecture, graffiti/street art, and public art museums. From the BCE era public art has been closely associated with countless communities. One key example being in Ancient Greece architecture like the Parthenon and the countless cathedrals filled with elaborate mosaics. Transitioning to the 20th century public art continued to be used in religious contexts but it also developed into a political means. These works were utilized during war time as a form of propaganda for different countries. Examples ranging from Germany, Mexico and even major U.S. cities like New York and Los Angeles.⁶ One example of propaganda based art stems from socialist realism. In short this type of communist art was meant to paint an ideal society that the masses would subscribe to as an ultimate goal. This style started in 1922 and ran its course to the late 1980's in the Soviet Union. It was meant to illustrate the archetype of the perfect [working soviet man](#). It was portrayed in a hyper-realistic style to make that distinction of reality across mediums such as [posters](#), photographs, and sculptures. Most importantly, the socialist realism was used to communicate messages between rulers and the ruled.⁷ This is one of many examples of how public art can be exceptionally powerful in shaping beliefs for the masses. I give this example to show the impact public art can have on society, whether that impact be for the better or the worst. Ultimately the term public art serves more as an umbrella term rather than a specified stagnant form.

⁶ *Public Art*, (Visual Arts Cork, n.d.)

⁷ *Socialist Realism: The History of the Communist Art Movement* (Art In Context, 2021.)
<https://artincontext.org/socialist-realism/>

For the purpose of this project only public art created by Black artists in the United States will be highlighted. Throughout my research studies I have been interested in exploring artists who actually look like me and create art for my people. Often the works I discussed in my personal background were created by either famous artists or white creatives. However, I believe that lack of diversity neglects the very communities that are so closely tied to art. After all, the great Romare Bearden proclaimed, “Black art has always existed. It just hasn’t been looked for in the right places.”⁸ That notion reveals the importance of not only the creation of Black art representative of diverse neighborhoods but also the need for proper representation institutionally not just in our own communities. That mural of a Black boy or girl on a wall in a little kids neighborhood could be the spark that leads them to pursuing a creative career or trying a new artform themselves. That is the beauty of public art: it can embody a large political message while also just providing a light for those who experience its presence.

Within my research on public art created by Black artists a couple of works will be analyzed from each decade ranging from 1980-2020. These highlighted works will be strictly sculptures and murals. I have selected sculptures due to their increased popularity over the last few decades and their significance to many of the artists I study. Historically sculptures are the epitome of representation and power from the dawn of time. Look at any great ruler or figure of any era and more than likely to depict their importance there was some form of sculpture created to honor them. A lot of the works I am analyzing are meant to show the importance of Black people through sculpture. Being that representation is exactly what I have yearned for in my own experiences, it is only fitting that I focus on that specific medium of public art. On the other hand I have selected murals for two main reasons: they are strongly tied to their respective

⁸ Romare Bearden (The Art Story, n.d.)
<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/bearden-romare/>

communities and two they can help me learn about smaller name artists. Typically murals that I have studied are meant to represent the communities they are located within. Going a step further the artists who are commissioned to create murals have ties to either the specific community or the messages being conveyed. A major goal of my research is to have a variety of well-known and lesser-known artists. By selecting sculptures and murals out of the various forms of public art I am able to successfully accomplish this goal and interest.

In order to be fully transparent in my experience, my interactions with all of these public art examples will be from a digital perspective. There are some major differences in interacting with public art through a screen versus in-person face-to-face. Online I have the advantage of seeing the tiny details of these massive sculptures and murals. Conversely, these works are meant to be witnessed in person to get the full experience. I remember taking pictures in front of murals like William Puckett's *NoDa* Mural in high school and being in awe at their size. There is a certain weight of importance and curiosity that accompanies public art in person that cannot be replicated through a screen. However, I will argue that seeing public art sculptures and murals online lets one see the entirety of the work and then go into detail next. In-person, the inverse is true as typically one will focus on one small detail and then have to back up to truly embrace the entirety of the work. While there are pros and cons to each viewing experience, it is important to consider how this impacts my analysis of each example.

Jumping into my analysis process of each specific artist I want to acknowledge there is a difference in information available on well-known versus lesser-known artists. Take for instance an artist who is commissioned to make a sculpture that is 30-foot-tall versus an artist commissioned to create a mural on a small 10-foot-tall wall. The artist of the sculpture will more than likely have tons of research that have been done on their upbringing and art. Yet, the mural

artist will have a fraction of that same research regarding their biography. Being aware of this stark difference I plan on making up for that lack of research through inquiry. For lesser-known artists, I can act as though I am interviewing them and really utilize my visual analysis skills to look for meanings. I believe this is the beauty of having a variety of artists, it affords me the opportunity to honor artists who might not receive the same recognition as big names and also take different approaches.

What intrigues me about this difference in the historical records is the significance of a lack of information on Black artists who are creating change in their communities. Oftentimes the most well-known Black artists are constantly put on display as a form of tokenism. Whereas the lesser-known artists are not paid as much attention because they might not bring in the money that many institutions are craving. When I think of an increase in diversity and representation on a large scale, I always first consider why is this taking place, is it coming from a genuine or more of a manipulative place. Knowing this I plan on being cognizant of how I approach my discussion of artists of varying calibers. Starting off the list, it is only right that I start out with a fellow queen city native, Mr. Romare Bearden.

1980s

Romare Bearden Background

Romare Bearden's upbringing is perhaps the most unique of the artists in my research. He was born in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1911 to a family full of activists and artists. His father was a pianist and his mother was an activist. Two of his grandfathers painted and drew in their free time as well. However, Bearden's family's success was impacted by the South's racism and Jim Crow Laws. The three were forced to migrate up North like many other Black families at the

time. In 1914, they decided to touch down in New York City. When they arrived his father worked as a sanitation inspector and his mother became a newspaper correspondent for the *Chicago Defender*. His mother was also the first president of the Negro Women's Democratic Association. Most notably, their household became a hub for artists and activists of the Harlem Renaissance. Poet Countee Collen, actor, and activist Paul Robeson plus musician Duke Ellington who just so happened to be Bearden's cousin. His grandmother would have him visit her in Pittsburgh over the summers. At her boarding house, Bearden would listen to the steel mill workers' stories for hours and he would eventually use these as inspiration for his later works.

Moving on to his early adolescence Bearden's family moved to Pittsburgh. After high school, he decided to play semiprofessional baseball in the Negro Leagues in Boston. Eventually, he attended Lincoln University (the first HBCU in the United States) and became involved in art where he was a cartoonist. He ended up transferring to Boston University for a bit and then went to New York University. Being the unpredictable artist he is, he transferred again to Columbia University where he studied mathematics. During his college years, he earned his money as a political cartoonist for Black publications like W.E.B. DuBois' *The Crisis*. Before graduating he was drafted into the Army where he served for three years. Once he returned, he became a caseworker for the NYC Department of Services until he could afford to become a full-time artist with his wife.

Bearden's early artwork revolved around characteristics of Abstract Expressionism and collage. His career really took off in the mid to late 1940s. His *The Passion of Christ* (1945) series was exhibited at the famous Samuel Kootz Gallery in New York City. That same year The

Museum of Modern Art bought his *He is Arisen* (1945) painting from that same series. Two years later, Bearden was one of four Black artists to be selected for an exhibition in Manhattan blue-chip galleries. In 1948, etched himself in history as one of the most notable American modernists as he exhibited multiple works at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Continuing along with the story of the most interesting artist, Bearden moved to Paris to study art history and philosophy at Sorbonne. While there for two years he connected with Pablo Picasso and even philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. After he came back to New York, he focused on music creation and even created a few Jazz tunes.

Following his time in music his return to the artworld was challenging as the Kootz gallery removed Bearden due to his works not fitting their mold of contemporary abstraction. He worked even harder on his craft, founding the Spiral Group in 1962 and forming the Cinque Gallery of New York in late 1969. The move to form Cinque Gallery alongside Ernest Crichlow and Norman Lewis was in opposition to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Harlem on My Mind* (1969) exhibition which rejected Black artists from being involved. Cinque only incorporated work made by Black artists. Moving into the 1970s Bearden and his wife spent a lot of time in the Caribbean at St. Martin island. While relaxing after decades of hard work Bearden continued to stretch his skills by working on costume design for his wife's dance shows and even infusing Caribbean culture into his collages. The end of his career was filled with recognition and accolades. He was awarded the President's National Medal of the Arts in 1987 and given honors by the National Urban League and the NAACP.⁹

The reason I have spent so much time outlining Bearden's upbringing is because it gives insight into the meanings within his artworks and how he set the tone for so many Black artists,

⁹ Bearden (The Art Story)

as he spent so much of his time advocating for upcoming Black artists. He utilized collage to express his experience as a Black man and all of the locations he lived in from the South, North, and even abroad. I find his story to be truly inspirational and touching. When I was 13, I would visit [Romare Bearden park](#) in the heart of Charlotte, North Carolina and just take in the skyline and art for hours. Now studying his work on my own agenda I feel like it's a full circle moment.

Pittsburgh Recollections (1984)

Out of all of the works I could have selected by Bearden I decided to choose [Pittsburgh Recollections](#) because the mural has a fascinating story of demolition and reassembly. The story is unique in that many of the murals I have selected for this project are either covered up or destroyed. Whereas this particular tile mural had to be completely removed and relocated under a strict time crunch. The mural itself is 13 foot high by 60 feet wide and features 780 ceramic tiles (12 inches by 12 inches) combined to create a collage of scenes honoring Pittsburgh and the memories Bearden associated with the city.¹⁰ At first glance, I notice soldiers, steel-mill workers, and a lot of machines. Further research led me to realize that the mural is a chronological story from left to right. The soldiers and houses on the left side of the mural are connected to the early settlers of Pittsburgh. Slide over to the middle and there is an emphasis on water and steamboats with barges as it's the merging point of two large channels. Pittsburgh played a major role in the steamboat industry's history. I dug deeper into this history and found out that, "By the 1830s, nearly 40 percent of the nation's steamboats were being manufactured in Western Pennsylvania, using locally-produced wood, iron, glass and paint."¹¹ Bearden does a wonderful job of using the

¹⁰ *Saving Romare Bearden's Pittsburgh Recollections* (McKay Lodge Laboratory Fine Art Conservation, 2019) <https://mckaylodge.com/saving-beardens-pittsburgh-recollections/>

¹¹ *Pittsburgh's Time as a Steamboat City* (Rivers of Steel, 2020) <https://riversofsteel.com/steamboats/>

water and steamboats to not only tie the city's history together but also to add a sense of movement and life to the mural.

Moving to the right portion of the mural there is an emphasis on steel-mill workers. Pittsburgh being coined the Steel City explains why the steel industry portion of the mural is so large. Bearden also uses this moment to highlight the detrimental aspects of the steel industry. The mill life was arduous and dangerous work. Many workers did not make it past 40 years old and some started working as children. The workers were also given terrible pay and many of whom were immigrants and migrants. There was a racial hierarchy that relegated Black workers to the worst and most dangerous jobs.¹² I would love to know if Bearden has any symbolism that connects to these not so bright aspects of the steel industry's history in the mural. Just knowing his attention to detail and background in activism I would be surprised that he did not include some type of social commentary in this imagery. Overall this massive mural tells the story of Pittsburgh in a unique way that is accessible to a wide variety of audiences.

The content explored below is from McKay Lodge Conservation's "Saving Romare Bearden's Pittsburgh Recollections" [documentary project](#).¹³ The importance of this work was shown in how much dedication the fine art conservation group put into its deconstruction and reconstruction in 2009. Due to the original Gateway Center light-rail transit station being expanded the piece had to be removed and under a strict time constraint. The work was valued at \$15,000,000 making the two month removal job that much more important.¹⁴ In November and December conservators and cutters worked 10 hour shifts seven days a week to complete the

¹² Nicole Sivens, *10 Brutal Facts About How Horrible Life Was In The Pittsburgh Steel Mills* (Ranker, 2021) <https://www.ranker.com/list/life-in-steel-producing-pittsburgh/nicole-sivens>

¹³ *Saving Romare Bearden's Pittsburgh Recollections* (McKay Lodge, n.d.)

¹⁴ *Saving Romare Bearden's Pittsburgh Recollections* (McKay Lodge, n.d.)

massive project. The project required a \$60,000 custom concrete saw to be created to properly remove 5-7 tiles a day.¹⁵ I find this story to be so intriguing because it speaks to the unpredictability of public art and its importance of place. Romare Bearden probably would never have imagined after his passing that one of his massive murals would be completely deconstructed piece by piece, relocated and reassembled in under 2 months.

Questions/Points of Reflection:

- What is the importance of collage as a mechanism for story-telling?
- Is this work meant to be read left to right? If read inversely, how might this change its meaning?
- Size comparison of People vs Steamboats. Intentional to stress the importance of the people in shaping Pittsburgh?
- What years would this work represent? Or is the goal to depict the energy of Pittsburgh and its people as a timeless memento?
- Did Bearden use bright colors and simple imagery to represent a child-like nature almost like his summers spent with his grandmother?
- How might the average person interpret this piece when they were walking by in the train station? Would they have to physically stop to gather enough information?
- What does this mural do for the Pittsburgh community and specifically this train station?

Roderick Sykes Background

Roderick Sykes is a painter and avid community organizer originally from St.Louis, Missouri. He is the co-founder of the 501(c)(3) non-profit [St. Elmo Village](#), a creative

¹⁵ *Saving Romare Bearden's Pittsburgh Recollections* (McKay Lodge, n.d.)

community center located in Los Angeles, California. The ultimate goal of his non-profit is to empower the youth to explore and develop their creativity plus aid adults in rediscovering their creative spirits.¹⁶ To accomplish this the organization provides workshops that teach skill sets across a variety of artistic mediums ranging from drawing, painting, and even graphic design and photography. Sykes was a firm believer in using art to create social change in his community. Throughout his early career he created countless public art commissions across Los Angeles.¹⁷ What I find so inspiring about his work is his commitment to sparking creativity in the minds of the youth.

Literacy by Roderick Sykes (1989)

Roderick Sykes was commissioned to create the Neighborhood Pride [*Literacy \(1989\)*](#) mural on the Los Angeles Unified School District maintenance building located on Pico Boulevard. On the mural there are faces of three boys: Leneon Guest (Black), James Anderson (Asian), and Carlos Rittner (Latino). It was meant to honor the ethnic diversity of Los Angeles as a whole. At large it celebrated the importance of literacy and community love through artistic expression. A fun fact the three boys depicted in the mural were a part of St. Elmo Village and actually helped create the mural alongside Sykes. The mural ended up disappearing around 2012. However, in 2015 [*Literacy*](#) was recreated with the help of his wife Jacqueline Sykes and placed on the exterior of the St. Elmo Village second floor. It was even signed by Roderick after its completion a few years before his passing.

Looking at this mural I am immediately hit with warm and rich tones of yellow, blue, red, and green. I think what is so striking about the piece is the hyperfocus on the three boys who are

¹⁶ *Who We Are* (St Elmo Village, n.d.)
<https://stelmovillage.org/who-we-are-2/>

¹⁷ *14 Black Muralists In LA You Need To Know* (Social and Public Art Resource Center, 2020)
<https://sparcinla.org/14-black-muralists/>

directly matching the viewer's gaze. It shows the importance placed on children and the power that they have in our communities. Another cool feature is the fourth child Diondre Wilson who is head in a book with a basketball at his feet. I really love this mural because I am sure it inspired so many little kids to let their creative sides roam free. Furthermore, I think this piece does a great job of reminding us as adults of the importance of never losing that kid-like imagination inside of our souls. Fast forward to the disappearance of this mural it seems inevitable that a piece that encapsulates the mission of St. Elmo Village would ultimately end up attached to the actual building. Considering this evolution I think it is important to remember that public art may have to be hand removed like *Pittsburgh Recollections* or even recreated like *Literacy* but in the end, they just take on a new life. Plus, imagine how many people get to experience the mural for the first time during the recreation process at its new location.

Questions/Points of Reflection (Interview format aimed toward Roderick Sykes):

- Mr. Sykes, do you happen to know what your students Leneon Guest, James Anderson, Carlos Rittner, and Diondre Wilson are up to nowadays?
- What are the core themes you think are most prominent in your *Literacy* mural?
- What did it feel like to sign the Literacy 2.0 if you will at the St. Elmo Village? To me it feels like the wall of St. Elmo Village is the perfect home for a mural that encapsulates the core mission of your non-profit.
- The new mural is elevated significantly now, was there a reason behind that decision outside of the practicality of it being harder to remove? It is almost like the next chapter, I can just picture little kids sitting on the grass and looking up at four role models who once were in the same shoes.

- How do you see public art as a vehicle for enacting social change in our respective communities?
- What tips would you give an artist who is struggling to create?

1990s

Alice Patrick Background

Muralist Alice Patrick was born in Los Angeles, California in 1948. Her education consists of degrees from both the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena and the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. She is noted as being the first Black woman to paint murals in the city by the City of Los Angeles. Patrick also served as an elementary school art teacher for some time.¹⁸ At the core she was all about using art to inspire the youth. Patrick's most well known work is the community mural *Woman Do Get Weary But They Don't Give Up (1990)*. Later in her career, she started selling prints of civil rights activists and even opened her own gallery called Aliceland. Considering her impact I was surprised at how little I was able to find on her personal background. Another example of how a lot of the most influential artists are often not given as much recognition as they deserve.

***Women Do Get Weary But They Don't Give Up* by Alice Patrick (1990)**

[Woman Do Get Weary But They Don't Give Up \(1990\)](#) is a mural located at the National Council for Negro Women. The painting incorporates 9 influential Black women. The two pioneers Mary McLeod Bethune and Dorothy Height are the founders of the council. To their sides are anonymous women meant to represent the power of all women whether they be

¹⁸ Profile: Alice Patrick (Black Art Story, 2020)
<https://blackartstory.org/2020/09/07/profile-alice-patrick-1948/>

mothers, grandmothers, or sisters. In the back there is Josephine Baker, Oprah Winfrey, Alice Patrick, Dr. Dorothy Height, Sarah Vaughan, Amy Womans, and Florence Griffith Joyner. Patrick says the figures in color paved the way for the woman in the back and all of the women who walk past the mural daily.¹⁹ Another interesting aspect is the designing of this mural actually stemmed from a conversation Patrick had with her daughter. Her daughter recommended she add the figures on the back row which inspired Patrick to put the figures on the first row.

I really enjoyed learning about this mural for the fact that it does a phenomenal job in representing Black women. Patrick made sure to incorporate women who were not just celebrities but could be anyone's family member. In an interview with Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) Patrick expressed how the everyday woman is important too; they just do not get as much attention.²⁰

Questions/Points of Reflection (Interview format aimed toward Alice Patrick):

- Would you say this mural is a memento to Mary McLeod Bethune? I noticed the Last Will and Testament at the top and how her figure is somewhat of the central figure.
- Is there a significance with the color blue throughout the painting?
- Did you know you wanted to insert yourself in the painting originally or was that a recommendation you received (daughter or other artists on-site)?
- What are the flowers and leaves on the floor of the mural representative of... are they connected to the figures that sit above them?
- Were you able to get the reactions from any of the women you painted in this mural after you showed them?

¹⁹ Saving Alice Patrick's 'Women Do Get Weary, but They Never Give Up (SPARC ART, 2012)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIgwX6tbp6Q>

²⁰ Saving Alice Patrick's 'Women Do Get Weary, but They Never Give Up

- How long did it take to restore the mural? Is that like a weekend or week-long process?
- What connection does the title have to representation and being Black in America?

Moses Ball Background

Moses Ball is a muralist from South Central Los Angeles, California. He received his fine and studio arts degree from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Ball uses his artistic skill to tell the stories of community heroes. Ball utilizes themes of social justice and tones of spirituality to showcase marginalized activists and everyday people whose stories are often ignored.²¹ Speaking to the idea of murals being more accessible Ball argues, “Mural making has always been kind of like our political voice in our community. It’s a way that we can speak upon issues when the media wouldn’t cover it”.²² Ball has created murals in multiple Black communities in Los Angeles. One of the most notable and earliest being the Black Seeds (1990) mural he created with the Shaw Park Muralists for the SPARC Neighborhood Pride commission.

In the last few years Ball has created countless murals meant to inspire the youth. The first example being [The Heart of Hyde Park \(2019\)](#) mural on the corner of Crenshaw Boulevard that depicts community activist Assata Umoja and rapper and community activist Nipsey Hussle. Ball really got the community’s thoughts to lead the project. He met with the Park Mesa Heights Community Council²³ to discuss themes and even had local students contribute to the sketches of the figures in the mural.²⁴ In the same year Ball helped create the [Challengers Art Therapy Mural \(2019\)](#) supported by Blue Shield of California and Wellnest. Heworked alongside the

²¹ *In The Paint: Artist Spotlight* (NBA, n.d.)

<https://www.nba.com/lakers/in-the-paint-gallery-moses-ball>

²² Jason Lewis, *Muralist Moses Ball’s work is on display in South Los Angeles to help combat gentrification* (Los Angeles Standard Newspaper, 2021)

<https://lastandardnewspaper.com/index.php/art/962-muralist-moses-ball-s-work-is-on-display-in-south-los-angeles.html>

²³ Lewis, *Muralist Moses Ball’s* (LASN)

²⁴ *The Heart of Hyde Park Mural* (ABC30, 2019)

<https://abc30.com/mural-hyde-park-nipsey-hussle-art/5663452/>

Challengers Boys and Girls club middle and high school aged members to depict the dreams and hopes they had for their community across eight-weeks.²⁵ Looking at all of his work it is clear that Moses Ball is committed to creating Black public art that showcases the beauty of his community and its members.

***Black Seeds* by Moses Ball and Shaw Park Muralists (1990)**

[*Black Seeds \(1990\)*](#) is a mural that was sparked from an idea that local community activist Gus Harris Jr. had envisioned years earlier who eventually commissioned Moses Ball to create. It was meant to highlight important Black heroes through an African American tree of life.²⁶ Ball joined forces with local artists Eddie Orr, David Mosley, William Stubbs, Norman Maxwell, and Michael McKenzie to create the Shaw Park Muralists group. In the mural each branch of the tree has a couple prominent Black activists. Some examples being: Frederick Douglas, Nelson Mandela, Harriett Tubman, Theresa Hughes and Garrett Morgan. At the top there is even a drawing of Africa and the United States at the top.

I find this mural to be really powerful in showing an erased side of history. It highlights the achievements of thirty-six Black activists and leaders. Going a step further the mural also showcases the millions of Black people who died from slavery in the illustration of Black bodies blended into the tree. At the bottom there is imagery of slavery and the civil war. I think it is important to show the true history of this country and to not forget those who lost their lives. Most of my schooling on slavery was not really taught in school. My father had me read books and told me about the silenced side of history that textbooks left out purposefully. Overall this mural is a truthful representation of Black history that is timeless.

²⁵ *Challengers Clubhouse Art Therapy Mural with Blue Shield of California & Wellnest* (Boys & Girls Clubs, 2019) <https://www.bgcmla.org/challengers-mural-project>

²⁶ *14 Black Muralists* (SPARC, 2020)

Questions/Points of Reflection (Interview format aimed towards Moses Ball/Shaw Park

Muralists):

- Who's idea was it to make the tree itself Black bodies? What is the significance of these naked Bodies who support the figures outside of the branches? It is a detail that almost blends in until second glance.
- I really admire the diversity of figures on the tree ranging from activists, athletes, politicians and even inventors. Plus the wide spectrum of age is impressive.
- Was the addition of the Burger King logo a sponsorship? Or was it connected to the ads they created in the 1970s with questionable vernacular like this [one](#) and this [one](#)?²⁷
- Are the blank white faces meant to flip the script on the erasure of voice that Black people have faced for centuries at the hands of white people?

2010s

Abigail DeVille Artist Background

Artist Abigail DeVille was born in New York in 1981. Her artistic education consists of degrees from Yale School of Art and The Fashion Institute of Technology. Plus her residencies at both the American Academy in Rome and The Studio Museum in Harlem.²⁸ She believes she is just as much an archaeologist and historian as she is an artist. Her work revolves around the nexus between past and present. Specifically the role marginalized people and communities play within that history. Her artistic process starts with research of the location where her work will

²⁷ Lenika Cruz, 'Dinnertimin' and 'No Tipping': How Advertisers Targeted Black Consumers in the 1970s (The Atlantic, 2015) <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/06/casual-racism-and-greater-diversity-in-70s-advertising/394958/>

²⁸ Abigail DeVille Bio (Artsy, n.d.) <https://www.artsy.net/artist/abigail-deville>

be located. After she has completed the background research she hits the ground. DeVille literally uses any and everything that she can find on the streets and in the trash. The treasures she discovers are the foundation of her sculptural masterpieces and are the driving force behind her storytelling. There is a parallel between the revamped materials and her ultimate goal of telling the story of marginalized people and communities that have been erased from history.

Half Moon by Abigail DeVille (2016)

[Half Moon \(2016\)](#) is a shipwreck sculpture based on the 1609 “De Halve Maen” led by Captain Henry Hudson the “discoverer” of New York City. Hudson described the tens of thousands of indigenous people living there as, “Clothed in mantles of feathers and robes of fur, the women clothed in hemp, red copper tobacco pipes, and other things of copper they did wear about their necks” (Kaplan, 2016, p.1). DeVille spoke to the significance of how Hudson recalled their possessions and not their nature as human beings. Material wise the piece has wood from abandoned houses, fur representative of the Lenape Native Americans, and damaged American flags. The chaos and variety of objects associated with different parties is meant to represent the movement of ownership and displacement throughout history. In October of 2019, DeVille worked with the Caribbean Culture Center African Diaspora Institute (CCCADI) to have Half Moon placed on a float to be moved down 125th street in Harlem to create conversation between Spanish Harlem and West Harlem.²⁹ Another story built into this sculpture is the notion of fighting gentrification. The work is meant to tell the harsh realities of American history and also serve as an eye-sore to money hungry white investors looking to drive out the diverse families that live there.

²⁹ Isaac Kaplan, *In Harlem, Abigail DeVille Looks to Disrupt New York's History of Gentrification* (Artsy, 2016) <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-abigail-deville-aims-to-disrupt-centuries-of-new-york-gentrification>

After learning about the story behind *Half Moon* I am in shock at the details of the project and the seamless connections between history, art, and past and present. I really wish I could see a piece like this in-person to witness the different textures and smaller objects. This is an exact example of where I think seeing public art in person takes it to an entirely new level.

Questions/Points of Reflection:

- Does DeVille layout a blueprint of how she wants to combine the objects and then create the sculpture or does she play it by ear? Maybe even doing it in sections based on her research findings?
- How does the weather affect DeVille's works like this that have objects like flags, twigs, etc?
- Are any of the objects labeled or is there an artist's statement nearby that can help viewers understand the story behind the sculpture in front of them?
- How long does the research phase typically last for a project of this stature? Does DeVille reach out to certain figures or is it all self-taught based?
- Does she ever paint the pieces she finds or does she leave them in their original state as she found them in the dumpster or street?

Kerry James Marshall Background

Kerry James Marshall was born in Birmingham, Alabama during the civil rights era where he quickly became aware of the Black American experience as a child. At nine years old he witnessed the Watts riots in Los Angeles after relocating to Southern California with his family. During his upbringing, he was fascinated by art history and studied many European

artists and artistic movements. One that he specifically revisits and reworks is the foundations of American white abstract painters. However, he vowed to not simply adopt their styles but rather create his own and etch himself into history.³⁰ Marshall's paintings of everyday Black figures discuss issues of representation and topics of race within America. In his paintings the figures are dark tones of Black. He uses a mixture of egg tempera from a formula in a 15th century treatise by Renaissance artist Cennino Cennini to create a deeply rich black tone.³¹ Marshall's decision to create the black tone in this way versus the traditional oil paint also speaks to his artistic process. The egg tempera is only fresh for so long, which he enjoyed as it forced him to be meticulous with his decisions. His artistic style has even served as inspiration for contemporary artists like Kehinde Wiley. Wiley's ability to sketch himself into history in a unique style that elevates Black people is exactly what Marshall advocates Black artists should aim to do. However, like any great artist Marshall dabbles in a few mediums and carries over his style into each while holding true to his artistic values. One of Marshall's largest public sculptures is titled *A Monumental Journey* (2018) which was made in honor of the founders of the National Bar Association (NBA).

***A Monumental Journey* by Kerry James Marshall (2018)**

[*A Monumental Journey* \(2018\)](#) is a 30-foot-tall sculpture that contains 15,000 reflective, black manganese ironspot bricks. It is located in Des Moines, Iowa where the Negro Bar Association known as the Nation Bar Association was founded in 1925. The names of the 12 founders are etched in the perimeter of the sculpture's base.³² The shape is based on the African

³⁰ Kerry James Marshall - *Biography and Legacy* (The Art Story, n.d.)
<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/marshall-kerry-james/life-and-legacy/#:~:text=Childhood,Watts%20area%20of%20Los%20Angeles>.

³¹ Calvin Tomkins, *The Epic Style of Kerry James Marshall* (The New Yorker, 2021)

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/08/09/the-epic-style-of-kerry-james-marshall>

³² Lenore Metrick-Chen, *Kerry James Marshall Discusses A Monumental Journey* (Sculpture Magazine, 2018)
<https://sculpturemagazine.art/publicworks-kerry-james-marshall-discusses-a-monumental-journey/>

talking drum, a popular instrument in Western Africa for communication. Its sounds resemble the rhythm of human speech. While similar in shape, Marshall decided to shift the upper half of the drum to rest on top of the lower half. This shift enabled its meaning to represent a strong contrast between themes of justice vs injustice and communication vs miscommunication. Being so dedicated to his craft, Marshall did this work free of charge.

In reflection, I find this work to be super fascinating in its ability to emulate Marshall's goals of representing Blackness. Also, the piece really stands out compared to its surroundings, something that I find to be powerful when considering the history of representation of Blackness. Even the individual bricks are different colors depending on the timing of the day and the angles at which they are viewed. Marshall's paintings abide by this idea of illustrating all forms of Blackness rather than the sole stereotypical forms. A true representation of the Black community and what it means to highlight Blackness and not just in the forms that traditional whiteness accepts. Being truly dedicated to Blackness is exactly what Marshall is able to marshal within his work.

Questions/Points of Reflection:

- Questions of labor, by incorporating bricks, reveal the work it took not only to build this piece but also the work the 12 founders had to endure to create the NBA.
- What does Blackness mean in this piece? How does it relate to Marshall's goals as an artist and resemble his paintings/mural work?
- Consider the 12-year delay on this public art project & the issues of Marshall having to personally pay for water feasibility for the project?
- Marshall utilizes local resources (engineers/materials) rather than acquiring them by shipping from other distances, what does that go to say? significance?

Kehinde Wiley Background

Kehinde Wiley is a South-central Los Angeles native and New York based visual artist. He is a world-renowned portraiture artist who portrays urban Black and Brown men and women in an empowering fashion regardless of their sexuality. He blurs the boundaries of traditional and contemporary forms of representation. The large-scale paintings he generates are meant to disrupt historically white spaces and serve as a reclamation of Black power in contemporary media. Wiley utilizes traditional portraiture that reflects old master portraits from the 19th century by engaging with iconic and vibrant rosey/ornamental backgrounds and posing. In the midst of these backgrounds, he creates a sharp contrast by inserting Black figures in everyday urban clothing. One of my favorite works by Wiley is titled *Rumors of War (2019)* which uses monumental sculpture to touch on socio-political issues rooted in United States history. Fun fact this work was inspired by a series of [9 paintings](#) he created in the early 2000s. The project was inspired by equestrian portraiture as shown by the design and sheer size with some paintings exceeding 9 feet high. The difference from “traditional” equestrian portraiture is that these works make use of elaborate neon and metallic-based colored streetwear clothing. Doing this brings power to the Black men being depicted on horseback and sparks questions of representation and power. The figures in the paintings are all people he actually met on 125th street in Harlem. Kehinde Wiley passionately describes the series as, “The clash of centuries and societies heightens the sense that these men are riding steeds in a charged non-space outside of time, while the extraterrestrial greens and blues of the minimal landscape push the surreal aspect almost to the breaking point”.³³ I find this idea of Wiley breaking the boundaries of time super intriguing.

³³ *Rumors of War* (Artist Website, n.d.)
<https://kehindewiley.com/works/rumors-of-war/>

By establishing these figures in such a unique way and ignoring the “traditional” a sense of undeniable power is sparked.

I have included all 9 of these paintings in my image document so that readers can see exactly what Kehinde Wiley is talking about in the extraterrestrial greens and blues. The beauty in knowing about this series is that it goes to show that these issues of representation are still relevant as ever decades later. Plus it gives insight into the smaller details of the sculpture like facial structure and the selected streetwear clothing. I have a million questions about the connections between these paintings and the sculpture. However, I will save those for the reflection section after exploring the sculpture down below. Before jumping into the sculpture, I highly recommend checking out the paintings located in the image document and sitting with them for a bit to unpack their beauty.

***Rumors of War* by Kehinde Wiley (2019)**

[Rumors of War \(2019\)](#) is a 27 feet high and 16 feet wide bronze monumental sculpture that rests on top of a stone pedestal. The bronze sculpture depicts a young African-American man in urban streetwear striking a pose on top of an enormous horse. Wiley describes the inspiration for this sculpture as art and violence. It is meant to interrogate the history of romanticizing political violence in monuments across the United States. Wiley decided to create the sculpture in response to the sculpture of Confederate army general James Ewell Brown (J.E.B.) Stuart he saw in Richmond, Virginia.³⁴ This monument and countless other located in Virginia serve to memorialize the Confederacy and reinforce white power. Without the work of Wiley these monuments would remain “normal” and part of the everyday. Below I have featured

³⁴ *Kehinde Wiley- Biography and Legacy* (The Art Story, n.d.)
<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/wiley-kehinde/life-and-legacy/>

some questions this work and its history have sparked in my reflection on the power of public art by Black artists like Kehinde Wiley.

Questions/Points of Reflection:

- Significance of the posing of the young AA man that is meant to resemble the Richmond-based statue of Confederate general J.E.B. Stuart?
- Consider what it took for Lee & Stuart statues to be removed from VA after 113 years. The constant trauma Black/Brown folk viewers had to consider when seeing these in massive in-your-face confederate statues that celebrate a deeply racist history in the US.
- How does this work illustrate the political power of art?
- What conversations are sparked by inserting this work in white spaces?
- What energy and power does this bring to Black communities and people that pass by?
- How many Confederate statues exist in the United States vs How many statues highlighting Black figures are present in the United States?
- Unpack the backlash the removal of confederate statues and protests for Black Lives Matter generated during 2019.
- Is the sculpture of a specific figure from the paintings series that Wiley met in person or did he combine the features of multiple people?
- Why might Wiley have decided to make the sculpture entirely Bronze and not added color like his 9 paintings from the 2005-2008 series? How might Blackness be connected to this difference? Is it just a simple cost factor? Might the painting tones be too difficult to replicate on such a large scale? Maybe it was just a simple aesthetic choice that the Bronze would stand out more so in the cityscape it was positioned.

Simone Leigh Background

Simone Leigh is a midwest native who was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois by Jamaican missionaries in 1967. Leigh even has a bit of Hoosier like myself as she received her BA in fine art and philosophy in 1990 at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. Her studies revolved around ceramics. She originally intended on becoming a social worker upon graduation.³⁵ However, her true passion for merging ceramics and objects of the African diaspora came about following her internship at Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C. All of Leigh's artwork incorporate notions of what it means to be a Black woman in American society. Her work engages in reclamation as she takes traditional stereotypes and inverts them to become a form of empowerment for Black women. Examples of objects Leigh has used range from tobacco leaves to cowrie leaves.³⁶ *Brick House (2019)* is a key work that Leigh has embodied all of these characteristics into as a massive sculpture. At the core Leigh has a strong background in feminist theory, anthropology, postcolonial theory and the politics of race and identity.³⁷ When asked about how her background shapes her experience she outlined the importance of theory. Leigh explained that, "It wouldn't be interesting to me to make the work if I only had a formal interest. The artwork is more about the theory part than the materials".³⁸ It is important to note Leigh's emphasis on theory because it helps reveal the complexity of her works. At first glance one might just think her work is depicting a Black woman. However, there are layers and one has to pay attention to the specific choices and details to make the connections between her visual and theoretical depictions.

³⁵ William Grimes, *Simone Leigh* (Gavlak Gallery, 2015)

<https://www.gavlakgallery.com/attachment/en/5374f947a9aa2c98748b4568/News/554e4ef4eedb50232a212b09>

³⁶ *Simone Leigh* (Guggenheim Museum, n.d.)

<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/simone-leigh>

³⁷ Grimes, *Simone Leigh*

³⁸ Grimes, *Simone Leigh*

***Brick House* by Simone Leigh (2019)**

[*Brick House \(2019\)*](#) is a 16-foot-tall bronze sculpture of a Black woman. The head of the sculpture flows into a torso that is symbolic of a clay house and a skirt. The sculpture was unveiled on New York City's greenway in June 2019.³⁹ Both architecturally and historically the sculpture has strong ties to West Africa and the American South. Leigh specifically connected the work to Batammaliba architecture which is associated with people of Northeast Togo. These people view their architecture as an embodiment of the human body and its interaction with the environment. Regarding the South, Leigh found inspiration from the Mammy's Cupboard Restaurant in Natchez, Mississippi. While it takes on a more racist history, the notion of the Black female body as an image of labor is evident. Simone Leigh's *Brick House* fuses both of these forms of symbolism into one work for her sculpture. Considering the scale of the sculpture Leigh was encouraged to create a small scale model and have a computer generated scale size sculpture. However, speaking to her dedication to detail she declined as she was concerned the technology would lead the model to lose personal touches. Leigh also noted that the insertion of such an enormous figure in New York was meant to present a different idea of beauty. The Black woman will call visitors to reflect on the connection between our architecture and aesthetics and what values and beliefs those visuals promote.⁴⁰ When considering Leigh's purpose and location selection I keep thinking about the significance of Boros' argument of public art in having true power in generating deep reflection in viewers.

I am just imagining driving down the street in a cityscape surrounded by enormous modern buildings and in the center spotting this enormous statue of a Black woman. Cannot help

³⁹ Meg Whiteford, *The Making of Simone Leigh's Brick House* (Hauserwirth, 2020)
<https://www.hauserwirth.com/ursula/28500-making-simone-leighs-brick-house/>

⁴⁰ Whiteford, *The Making of Simone Leigh's Brick House*

but think of how many little Black girls and boys will be inspired and overjoyed when they witness this representation of someone who looks like them. While the piece is not permanent, it is interesting considering how many people will have viewed the sculpture from different perspectives. Even someone who has no connection to Black culture or art could have a simple google search and now they have new knowledge of the artist and their purpose. Without that experience that individual may never be exposed to a representation of a Black woman. While this may appear to be an obvious takeaway, I think it is so simple that as a society we forget that one moment of reflection is ultimately what leads to lasting change in beliefs.

Questions/Points of Reflection:

- What was the inspiration behind the exact dimensions of the sculpture? Are they connected to the Mammy's Cupboard Restaurant and the Batammaliba Architecture typical size? Or is it just based on the feasibility of the clay material used and its weight restrictions?
- Are the distinctive facial features noticeable if one is driving by in their car? Overall how much detail is seen from a lower vantage point? Do you have to be up close to truly see the intricate details?
- From a structural perspective, how is a piece this massive constructed once it arrived from Philadelphia to New York? Especially considering the location on the greenway.
- What specific theory might Leigh have incorporated into the construction of this bronze sculpture from her earlier studies? Similar to Kehinde Wiley, did Leigh utilize her previous works in the creation of this large-scale figure?

- What was the most difficult part to make by hand outside of the rosettes for the sculpture's hair that ultimately did not make the final cuts? What complications might have been experienced due to its size?
- How many separate molds were created and connected to each other to make this one massive sculpture?
- Did Leigh's internship at The Smithsonian National Museum of African Art have a major role in shaping this project?
- What feedback did she receive from strangers on this project, like messages from viewers and questions from other artists?

Closing Reflection/Journey Recap

Having completed my research and reflection on public art created by eight powerful Black artists I am left with a smile. Throughout my informal education, I yearned to have a connection to the public art I experienced. While I have yet to experience any of these artworks in person I can say I have accomplished my ultimate goal of doing further research about public art created by Black artists. Before jumping into my research, I thought I would only focus on artists and movements from the 1940s to the present. However, making that shift from the 1980s to the present really enabled me to be more intimate with the few artists I selected. Having completed this project I am still left with a few questions and areas for further research:

Questions:

1. What does the future hold for public art created by Black artists?
2. Will the push towards digital technology and notions of the metaverse reshape how we view public art? Will this shift if true, create greater opportunities for representation of

Black artists and communities, or will it only exacerbate the issues outlined in this project?

3. What needs to be done to increase the representation of Black artists in the media? Is social media a solution for the present moment considering the complexity of institutions?
4. How might a film about public art created by Black artists be beneficial for the community and provide greater representation within the medium?

Research Topics:

1. Public Art Map (determining locations in the United States that could benefit from more public artworks created by Black artists) mapping out the works nationwide
2. Conversational Connections (more juxtaposition of these works would be beneficial to see patterns and differences of larger versus smaller artists/public art examples)
3. Lesser-known Artists Interview Series (compiling a catalog of Black artists who create change in their communities via public art and interviewing them digitally)

Acknowledgments

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program. If it were not for these two individuals and the seamless communication they foster between committee members, students, and the university this program would not be here today.

Endnotes

1. Following the BLM protests and Covid-19 store closures there were tons of plywood scraps discarded and Worthless Studios decided to create a project that turned these materials into art. Over 200 applications were submitted with 5 finalists being selected. Each of the public art projects created touch on topics of diversity, social justice, and civic engagement. Matt Hickman, *Five protest plywood-repurposing public art installations are now on view across New York City* (The Architects Paper, 2021) <https://www.archpaper.com/2021/05/five-protest-plywood-protection-project-on-display-nyc/>
2. Artist Tanda Francis designed this public art sculpture for Worthless Studios plywood project. It even incorporates music to enhance the viewing experience. Overall the work is consumed by Black faces that are all connected to each other with a blurred mirror on top. Artist Francis creates works like this to “undo stigmatization of blackness by presenting black identities as divine and as a foundation to our shared humanity” Tanda Francis, *Rock It Black* (Artist Website, 2021)
3. This site was the foundation of my understanding of what public art consists of in its many layers. *Public Art: Definition, History, Types* (Visual Arts Cork, n.d.)
4. Having studied philosopher Camus in another honor scholar class I felt this quote was relevant and a key dot connection in my interdisciplinary research. Highly recommend this book, it draws some interesting connections between philosophy, politics, and public art. Diana, Boros, “*Creative rebellion for the twenty-first century: The importance of public and interactive art to ... political life in America*” (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.21.
5. The idea of public art generating deep reflection is what drove me to be so intrigued in this medium and its power over traditional art which is in a more enclosed setting. Boros, *Creative rebellion*, p.156
6. *Public Art*, (Visual Arts Cork, n.d.)
7. I included this source to speak to the influence public art can have on the masses. Whether it be used for positive or negative... at the end of the day there is power involved. *Socialist Realism: The History of the Communist Art Movement* (Art In Context, 2021.) <https://artincontext.org/socialist-realism/>
8. Romare Bearden (The Art Story, n.d.)
9. Bearden (The Art Story)
10. A truly unique story that outlines every detail of how this gigantic mosaic mural was transported. Definitely one of my favorite examples of the unpredictable challenges involved in public art. *Saving Romare Bearden's Pittsburgh Recollections* (McKay Lodge Laboratory Fine Art Conservation, 2019) <https://mckaylodge.com/saving-beardens-pittsburgh-recollections/>
11. *Pittsburgh's Time as a Steamboat City* (Rivers of Steel, 2020)
12. Being an avid history enthusiast I was led to this piece that outlined the harsh realities of Mill life. Especially the racism Black workers had to experience. Nicole Sivens, *10 Brutal Facts About How Horrible Life Was In The Pittsburgh Steel Mills* (Ranker, 2021) <https://www.ranker.com/list/life-in-steel-producing-pittsburgh/nicole-sivens>
13. *Saving Romare Bearden's Pittsburgh Recollections* (McKay Lodge, n.d.)
14. *Saving Romare Bearden's Pittsburgh Recollections* (McKay Lodge, n.d.)
15. *Saving Romare Bearden's Pittsburgh Recollections* (McKay Lodge, n.d.)

16. St Elmo Village is a historical non-profit that is all about inspiring the youth to use art as a power. I am interested in either working for or creating an art based non-profit in the future and so I found this to be an awesome discovery. *Who We Are* (St Elmo Village, n.d.)
17. This source is responsible for almost half of my selected artists. I really enjoyed learning about lesser-known artists who dedicate their life-work to using art to help their community and sparking creativity in the youth. *14 Black Muralists In LA You Need To Know* (Social and Public Art Resource Center, 2020) <https://sparcinla.org/14-black-muralists/>
18. Profile: Alice Patrick (Black Art Story, 2020)
19. Another example of the process of public art restoration and how it is effected over time. Plus the importance of community in creating murals that are representative of the neighborhoods they reside. Saving Alice Patrick's 'Women Do Get Weary, but They Never Give Up' (SPARC ART, 2012)
20. Saving Alice Patrick's 'Women Do Get Weary, but They Never Give Up'
21. *In The Paint: Artist Spotlight* (NBA, n.d.)
22. Loved this piece as it really allowed me to see Moses Ball perspective through an interview. He really spoke to the pride he takes in helping his community. Art is not just art for him, it is a window into changing his community. Jason Lewis, *Muralist Moses Ball's work is on display in South Los Angeles to help combat gentrification* (Los Angeles Standard Newspaper, 2021) <https://lastandardnewspaper.com/index.php/art/962-muralist-moses-ball-s-work-is-on-display-in-south-los-angeles.html>
23. Lewis, *Muralist Moses Ball's* (LASN)
24. *The Heart of Hyde Park Mural* (ABC30, 2019)
25. A project that Moses Ball worked on that used art as therapy across an 8-week mural project the local boys and girls club helped to create. He even spoke to the youth and they had different activities lined up. *Challengers Clubhouse Art Therapy Mural with Blue Shield of California & Wellnest* (Boys & Girls Clubs, 2019) <https://www.bgcmla.org/challengers-mural-project>
26. *14 Black Muralists* (SPARC, 2020)
27. In reflecting on the *Black Seeds* mural I was confused on the burger king logo. After a quick google search I was led to this article on racist advertisements to which I had never heard of before. While I am unsure of a connection it was interesting learning about marketing from back in the day and its roots. Lenika Cruz, *'Dinnertimin' and 'No Tipping': How Advertisers Targeted Black Consumers in the 1970s* (The Atlantic, 2015)
28. *Abigail DeVille Bio* (Artsy, n.d.)
29. Very in-depth piece that outlines the history, inspiration, and purpose behind *Half Moon*. Being an interview it gave me some up-close insight into the brain of Abigail DeVille. Isaac Kaplan, *In Harlem, Abigail DeVille Looks to Disrupt New York's History of Gentrification* (Artsy, 2016) <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-abigail-deville-aims-to-disrupt-centuries-of-new-york-gentrification>
30. *Kerry James Marshall - Biography and Legacy* (The Art Story, n.d.) <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/marshall-kerry-james/life-and-legacy/#:~:text=Childhood,Watts%20area%20of%20Los%20Angeles.>
31. Shoutout Professor Brea for sending this awesome piece that discusses the unique style of Kerry James Marshall. Being a very meticulous person I found inspiration learning about the creative process Marshall embodies in his daily work. Calvin Tomkins, *The Epic Style of Kerry James Marshall* (The New Yorker, 2021) <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/08/09/the-epic-style-of-kerry-james-marshall>
32. Another amazing interview based discussion. I think while viewing these public works virtually it is crucial hearing from the artist to get a better understanding and insight into the details that are not as visible virtually. Lenore Metrick-Chen, *Kerry James Marshall Discusses A Monumental Journey* (Sculpture Magazine, 2018) <https://sculpturemagazine.art/publicworks-kerry-james-marshall-discusses-a-monumental-journey/>

33. *Rumors of War* (Artist Website, n.d.)
34. *Kehinde Wiley- Biography and Legacy* (The Art Story, n.d.)
35. Super authentic piece on Simone Leigh that explains her art education and how that led her to where she is today. William Grimes, *Simone Leigh* (Gavlak Gallery, 2015)
<https://www.gavlakgallery.com/attachment/en/5374f947a9aa2c98748b4568/News/554e4ef4eedb50232a212b09>
36. *Simone Leigh* (Guggenheim Museum, n.d.)
37. Grimes, *Simone Leigh*
38. Grimes, *Simone Leigh*
39. Start to finish this piece illustrates every decision made in the creation of *Brick House*. It even includes images of the creative process something that is rare to find. Meg Whiteford, *The Making of Simone Leigh's Brick House* (Hauserwirth, 2020)
<https://www.hauserwirth.com/ursula/28500-making-simone-leighs-brick-house/>
40. Whiteford, *The Making of Simone Leigh's Brick House*

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