

# Stephen Friedman Gallery

Culture Type

Culture Type Picks: 14 Best Black Art Books of 2019

Victoria L. Valentine

10 January 2020

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BLACK ARTISTS spanning generations are receiving more and more critical recognition and opportunities. Some of the most compelling illustrated art books published in 2019 are monographs contributing to the much-deserved and in many cases long-overdue attention of individual artists. New volumes are dedicated to Kwame Braithwaite, Robert Colescott, Lubaina Himid, Suzanne Jackson, and Julie Mehretu. Other Culture Type picks highlight multiple artists. "Black Refractions" explores the Studio Museum in Harlem's storied art collection. "The New Black Vanguard" introduces young black artists bringing fresh new perspectives to fashion photography. Finally, released in advance of the Museum of Modern Art reopening in October, "Among Others: Blackness at MoMA" considers the institution's complex history with black artists, black audiences, and art about blackness. The Best Black Art Books of 2019 are well-designed volumes rife with beautiful images and informative new scholarship. (Titles listed in order of publication date.)

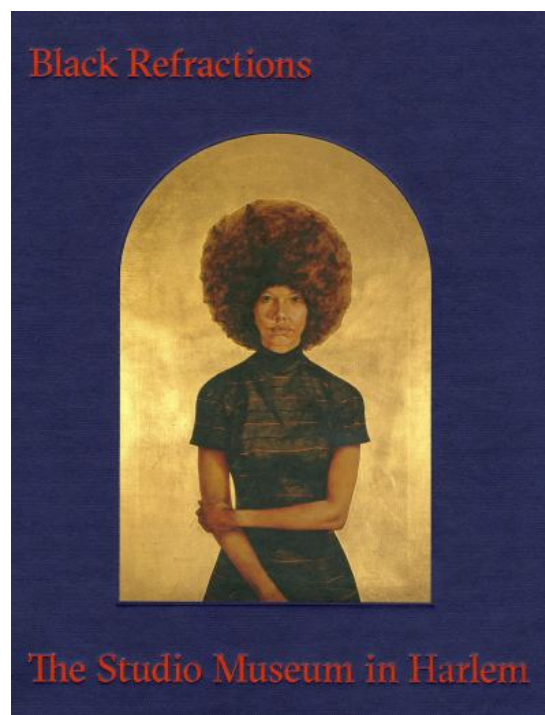


Image: "Stick to the Skin: African American and Black British Art, 1965-2015," By Celeste-Marie Bernier, with a foreword by Lubaina Himid (University of California Press, 344 pages). | Hardcover, Published Jan. 8, 2019

A fascinating array of black artists hails from the UK and the United States. Described as the first "comparative history of African American and Black British artists, artworks, and movements," *Stick to the Skin* "launches an important intervention into European histories of modern and contemporary art and visual culture as well as into debates within African American studies, African diasporic studies, and Black British studies." More than 50 artists active between 1965 and 2015 are considered. Chapters with telling titles bring together a panoply of artists from both sides of the Atlantic. Selections include: I'm Always

Ready to Die: Memorializing Slavery and Narrativizing Freedom (Betye Saar, Lubaina Himid, Benny Andrews, Tam Joseph); How to Paint Suffering: Anti-Portraiture, Anti-Product, and Anti-Painting (Frank Bowling, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Chris Ofili); Buried, Hidden, and Disguised: "Storying" in a State of Shock (Faith Ringgold, Sonia Boyce, Claudette Johnson); I Was Branded: Spectacularized Histories, Serial Narratives, and Illicit Iconographies (Steve McQueen, Hew Locke, Godfried Donkor, Hank Willis Thomas); and Hurting to Death: Struggle, Survival, and Storytelling in Salvaged Objects, Paints, Beads, and Steel (Lonnie Holley, Bessie Harvey, Sokari Douglas Camp, Joyce J. Scott).

Image: "Black Refractions: Highlights From the Studio Museum in Harlem," Edited by Connie H. Choi, with forewords by Thelma Golden and Pauline Willis, and contributions from Kellie Jones (Rizzoli, 232 pages). | Hardcover, Published Jan. 15, 2019



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When the Studio Museum in Harlem was founded 1968, it was not a collecting institution. Through gifts, the museum began to acquire artworks beginning in the early 1970s. Eldzier Cortor's "The Room" (1949) was the first painting to enter the collection in 1971. Over the past half century, the museum continued to acquire works through purchases and generous donations, adding works by Alma Thomas, Beauford Delaney, Malick Sidibé, Barkley Hendricks, Kerry James Marshall, Glenn Ligon, Chris Ofili, Mickalene Thomas, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, and nearly every artist-in-residence, including Njideka Akunyili Crosby and Jordan Casteel. "Black Refractions," documents a traveling exhibition bringing about 100 works from the Studio Museum's storied permanent collection to institutions and audiences around the country through December 2020. Works by 79 artists are showcased, each full-page illustration further illuminated by a brief essay. The volume explores the depth and breadth of the collection and also sheds light on the history of the museum. A conversation among Thelma Golden, Connie H. Choi, and Kellie Jones reveals how the museum's collection strategy and exhibition programming have developed and evolved over the years, while its core mission to serve as a nexus for artists of African descent remains firmly intact.



Image: "Kwame Braithwaite: Black is Beautiful," *Photographs and introduction by Kwame Braithwaite, with essays by Tanisha C. Ford and Deborah Willis (Aperture, 144 pages).* | Published May 2019

In the late 1950s and 60s, Harlem photographer Kwame Braithwaite combined his art, political vision, and buy black philosophy, to effect economic and social change. He trained his lens on the beauty of blackness, celebrating natural hair and a full range of skin tones and formalized his ideals through two organizations he founded with his older brother—African Jazz Arts Society and Studios (AJASS), a collective of multidisciplinary artists, and Grandassa Models (1962), a troupe composed of black women. "Black is Beautiful" is the first monograph to document his career. It accompanies a traveling exhibition organized by the Aperture Foundation and features a compelling mix of studio portraits, street shots, album cover images, and

behind-the-scenes photographs of prominent jazz figures. A three-part essay by Tanisha C. Ford explores Braithwaite's multifaceted practice and contextualizes his work. In the preface, Braithwaite writes that his goal "was to make sure that for generations to come, everyone who sees my work knows the greatness of our people."

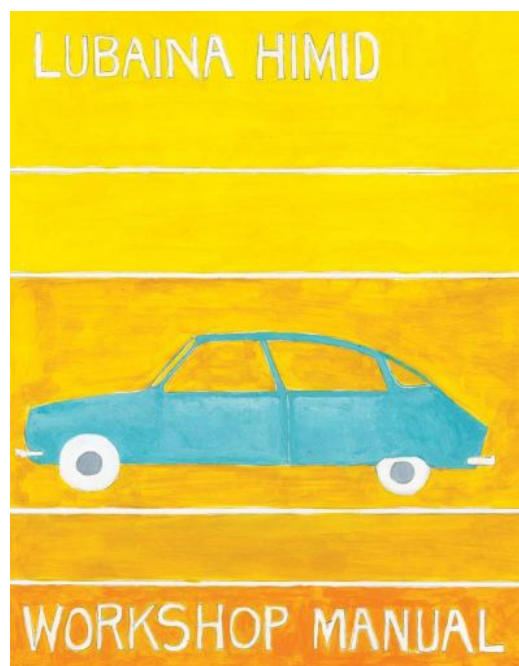


Image: "Lubaina Himid: Workshop Manual," Edited by Lisa Panting and Malin Stahl, with texts by Lubaina Himid, Helen Legg, Courtney Martin, Emma Ridgeway, and Zoé Whitley (Walther König, 312 pages). | Published June 18, 2019

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A real treasure, this lavishly illustrated volume serves as a “manual” of Lubaina Himid’s ambitious practice. An artist, curator, professor, and pioneer in the UK Black Arts Movement, Himid has been a stalwart presence in the British art world for four decades. Her work focuses on black representation, identity, and creativity; references slavery, colonialism, contemporary politics, migration, and refugees; and challenges the historic invisibility of blacks in British society. She makes works on paper; paintings on canvas, wood, and porcelain; and installations influenced by her early work in theater design. Long overdue recognition of her contributions has come in the past several years through a succession of institutional exhibitions and the Turner Prize, which she won in 2017. Himid is the first black woman and oldest artist to receive the prestigious prize. While she has been active for two generations, this volume is the first full monograph of her work. Featuring 280 color images of work made throughout her career (1976–2018), the volume explores both her curatorial and artistic practices. More than a dozen series on view in three recent survey exhibitions are highlighted, with Himid contributing illuminating texts about the artwork, explaining their backgrounds and meaning. Courtney J. Martin writes about Himid’s curatorial foundation which began when she was pursuing a masters at the Royal College of Art. Himid surveyed other young black artists and wrote her thesis about their experiences. Zoé Whitley considers “visible strategies” in Himid’s paintings. Other curators reflect on collaborating with Himid on recent solo exhibitions through essays and a conversation with the artist.

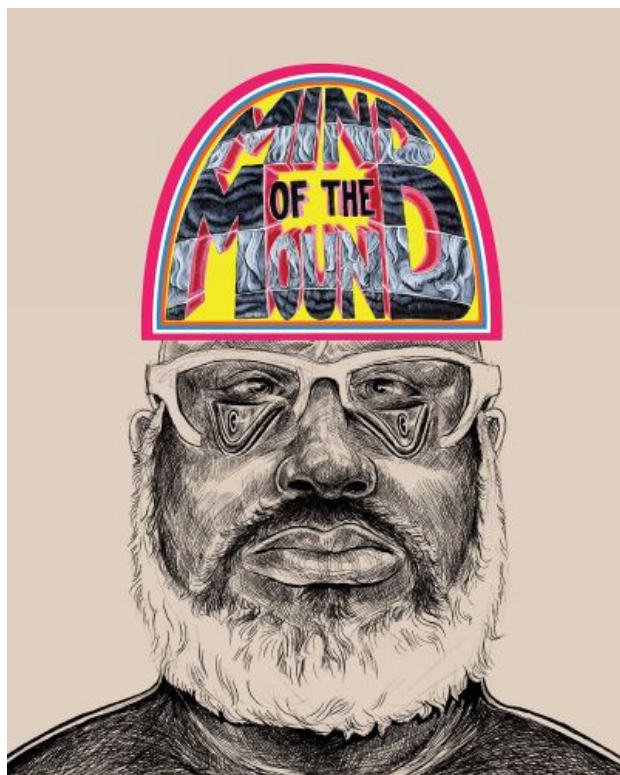


Image: “Trenton Doyle Hancock: Mind of the Mound: Critical Mass” by Denise Markonish, with contributions by Trenton Doyle Hancock, Lauren Haynes, Diana Nawi, Enongo Laumuba-Kasongo (a.k.a. Sammus), and Frank Oz (Prestel, 224 pages). | Published July 12, 2019

The toys, comic books, horror films, and super heroes Houston-based Trenton Doyle Hancock loved as a child have fueled a singular artistic practice centered around imaginative characters (Mounds and Vegans) and a mythological universe of his own making. This fascinating and revealing volume explores Hancock’s personal history and influences and documents his largest exhibition to date. “Mind of the Mound: Critical Mass” at MASS MoCA presented his paintings, drawings, and installations displayed alongside examples from his toy and pop culture collections and pages from a forthcoming graphic novel. In the introduction to the catalog, curator Denise Markonish writes that the immersive exhibition cum carnivalesque toy fair “combines Trent’s interests and characters, forming a complete (for now) snapshot of his brain.”

Overflowing with illustrations of his work and installation images from the exhibition, the book features a bold mix of art and text. It’s a riot of color with essays, a pair of conversations with the artist, and a “Moundverse Timeline” printed on brightly colored pages—blue, green, pink, yellow, red, and more. This eclectic volume even has an iron-on patch affixed to the cover with the book’s title embroidered on it. The patch is removable, giving fans of Hancock and his otherworldly creations a wearable keepsake.

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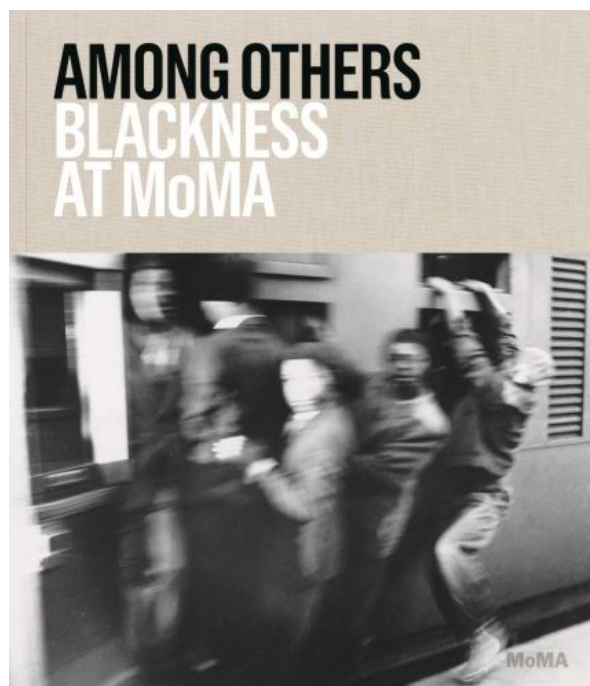
Image: "Deborah Roberts: The Evolution of Mimi," Edited by Andrea Barnwell Brownlee, with a foreword by Mary Schmidt Campbell, contributions from Kirsten Pai Buick, Erin J. Gilbert, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, and Antwaun Sargent, and a postscript by Franklin Sirmans (Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia for Spelman College of Fine Art, 160 pages). | Published July 29, 2019

The cursory observer might assume that artist Deborah Roberts's origin story began about five years ago. That's when her mixed-media collages of black girls began to be more widely recognized. But she's actually been developing her practice for decades. "I've been working on my craft for nearly thirty years, maybe longer," Roberts told Valerie Cassel Oliver in a conversation published in "Deborah Roberts: The Evolution of Mimi." She continued: "I had my own gallery a one point, did workshops, created projects with students. But that earlier work was something entirely different. The process is different as is the language and the way it is being presented. What I am doing right now, that's new to people, but not new to me. The language of the work has shifted, but it's not different work. How I create has evolved over time, but I am still

preoccupied with questions of beauty, family, identity, and love." The catalog documents an exhibition organized by Andrea Barnwell Brownlee at the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art that featured more than 80 works—paintings, collages, and hand-painted serigraphs made between 2007 and 2017. The show traced the evolution of Roberts from a figurative painter to a collage artist with a sustained interest in the power and vulnerability of black girls and the complexity of blackness. More than 100 pages illustrate the exhibition and essays by Kirsten Pai Buick, Erin J. Gilbert, and Antwaun Sargent further contextualize her work. It's a wonderful volume that provides invaluable insight into the timeless and timely work of Roberts.

Image: "Among Others: Blackness at MoMA," by Darby English and Charlotte Barat, with contribution from Mabel O. Wilson, et al. (Museum of Modern Art, 488 pages). | Published Aug. 20, 2019

Art historian Darby English joined the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) as a consulting curator in 2014. At the time, he told the New York Times the Painting and Sculpture Department was "looking in a black direction" and he was brought on to lend his expertise. Shortly thereafter, he began working on a major publication project with Charlotte Barat, a curatorial assistant in the department. What would become "Among Others: Blackness at MoMA" is a fascinating investigation of what MoMA Director Glenn D. Lowry describes in the foreword as "the museum's historical engagement with black artists, the black community, and art about blackness..." Exploring that terrain, English and Barat co-author "A Legacy of Deficit," a comprehensive essay that clearly states the challenges of the task: "What follows is a perspective on an institution where blackness, whether manifested in the persons or



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production of black artists, or in the artistic or political representation of black populations, has always struggled for situation, and where blackness again and again has encountered people who see it and don't know what to do." A second essay, "White by Design" by Mabel O. Wilson, was assigned when it was discovered that the museum's design and architecture collections included zero works by black architects and designers. These writings complement illustrations of about 200 works selected from MoMA's collection, mostly by black artists as well as some non-black artists whose works focus on black subjects or race-related issues. Brief accompanying texts by contributing scholars, curators, and artists expound upon each artwork which appears in alphabetical order, from Terry Adkins and John Akomfrah to Hale Woodruff and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. Among them, the cover image is an untitled circa 1960-63 photograph by Ernest Cole from a series called Nightmare Rides. Born in South Africa, Cole was later based in New York. Published in his well-known volume "House of Bondage," the apartheid-era scene captures black commuters clinging to an overcrowded moving train as it departs the platform.

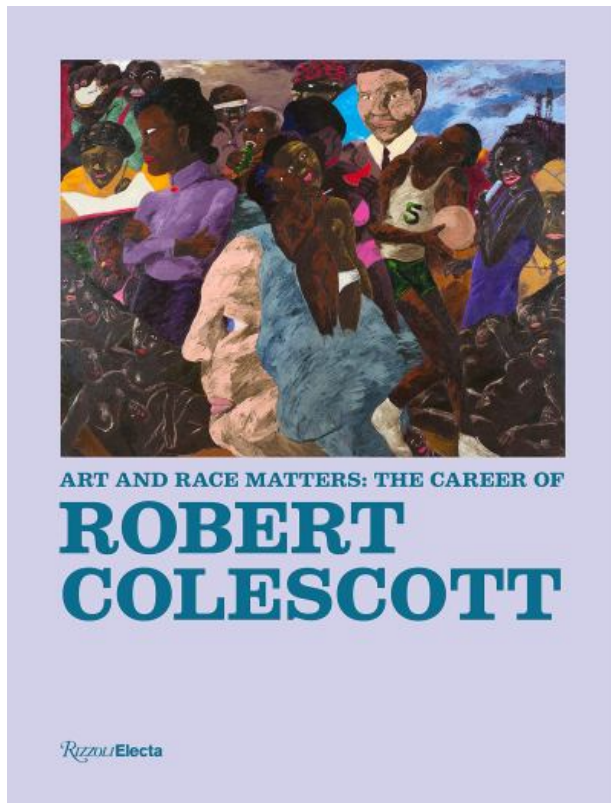


Image: "Art and Race Matters: The Career of Robert Colescott," *Edited by Lowery Stokes Sims and Raphaela Platow, with contribution from Matthew Weseley (Rizzoli, 256 pages). | Published Sept. 24, 2019*

"Art and Race Matters: The Career of Robert Colescott" is the rare exhibition catalog that is thoroughly readable. Robert Colescott (1925-2009) was an engaging storyteller whose paintings displayed his knack for wry humor, provocation, and fascinating images both comic and dramatic. Published to accompany a career-spanning survey organized by CAC Cincinnati, this catalog is the most comprehensive to document Colescott's practice. Lavish images of more than 80 paintings spanning 50 years are contextualized by essays from co-curators Lowery Stokes Sims and Matthew Weseley. The illuminating volume explores Colescott's life and work, connecting the artist and his content through scholarly writings, interviews, and reflections from people who knew him in various capacities, including his first art dealer Arlene Schnitzer. Richard J. Powell unpacks the artist's humor; Artist Mary Lovelace O'Neal recalls teaching with Colescott at UC Berkeley in the late 1970s; and several students reminisce about their experiences with Colescott.

Miriam Roberts writes about curating his 1997 Venice Biennale exhibition and Carrie Mae Weems discusses the fascinating portrait she made with him for the show. (Colescott was the first black artist to present a solo exhibition in the American Pavilion in Venice.) His cousin discusses the legacy of race in their family and a selection of Colescott's writings—mostly about his own work, but also that of artists William H. Johnson and Bob Thompson—provides further insight.

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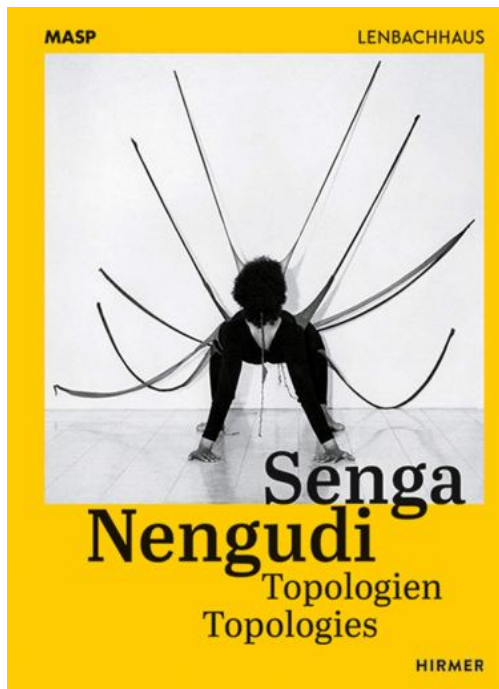


Image: *"Senga Nengudi: Topologies."* Edited by Matthias Mühling and Stephanie Weber, with contributions from Kellie Jones, Catherine Wood, and Malik Gaines (Hirmer Publishers, 336 pages). | Hardcover, Published Sept. 26, 2019

Senga Nengudi's work combines sculpture, performance and dance. A central figure in the Los Angeles black arts scene in the 1970s, who spent time in Japan and New York, her practice is informed by her concerns with racial and gender equality and interests in spirituality and "the way life experiences pull and tug" on the human body. This volume is published to coincide with "Topologies," the first comprehensive overview of her five-decade career, currently on view in Munich and traveling to São Paulo in spring 2020. Elements of movement and abstraction are present throughout her body of work. The exhibition presents more than 40 works, from her 1970s Water Compositions, to her fluttering fabric "spirits," and R.S.V.P. series of pantyhose sculptures. Many more are explored in the catalog, which includes an essay by Kellie Jones about Studio Z (the loose collective that included Nengudi, David Hammons, and Maren Hassinger), a reflection from Linda Goode Bryant

about Nengudi's 1977 R.S.V.P. exhibition at Just Above Midtown Gallery in New York, and a bounty of archival material. The preface notes the goal of the book: "No exhibition or publication until now has considered the development of the artist's work over the decades. This volume aims to remedy the situation by offering the most complete insight into Nengudi's body of work to date. (Text is published in English and German.)

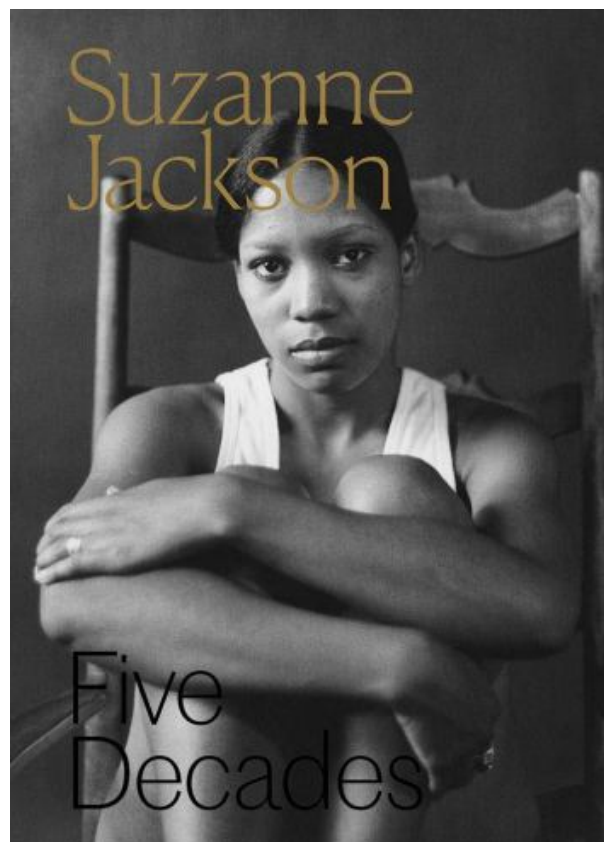


Image: *"Suzanne Jackson: Five Decades."* Edited by Rachel Reese, with a foreword by Betye Saar, and contributions from Melanee C. Harvey, Tiffany E. Barber, Julia Elizabeth Neal, and Suzanne Jackson (Telfair Museums, 160 pages). | Softcover, Published Oct. 22, 2019

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"Five Decades" traces the dynamic practice of Suzanne Jackson and fills a void of scholarship with a succinct but brilliantly comprehensive volume. Jackson began her career in Los Angeles, a dancer-turned-artist who opened Gallery 32 (1968-70), showing works by David Hammons, Timothy Washington, and Betye Saar. From the late 1980s to mid-90s, she earned a master's degree in theater design from Yale University and worked with a series of local and regional theaters creating sets and costumes. In 1996, Jackson moved to Savannah, Ga., to teach painting at the Savannah College of Art & Design for nearly two decades, before retiring. All the while, over five decades, she kept up her practice. At her core, Jackson is a painter, evolving over the years from painterly figurative abstraction to layered assemblage-style works and her latest technique, an inventive process in which she suspends acrylic, using the paint embedded with netting as her substrate. Accompanying the first full-career survey and most complete presentation of Jackson's work to date on view fall 2019 at Telfair Museums in Savannah, this catalog includes essays about her life, elements such as the natural world and spirituality that inspire her work, and also her various techniques. There's a chronology and full-color plates with extensive captions that explain titles and symbolic references and note details such as her use of more than 100 layers of acrylic wash to build up the surface of her canvases and that she was pregnant with her son when she painted a cherished portrait of her grandparents in 1970.



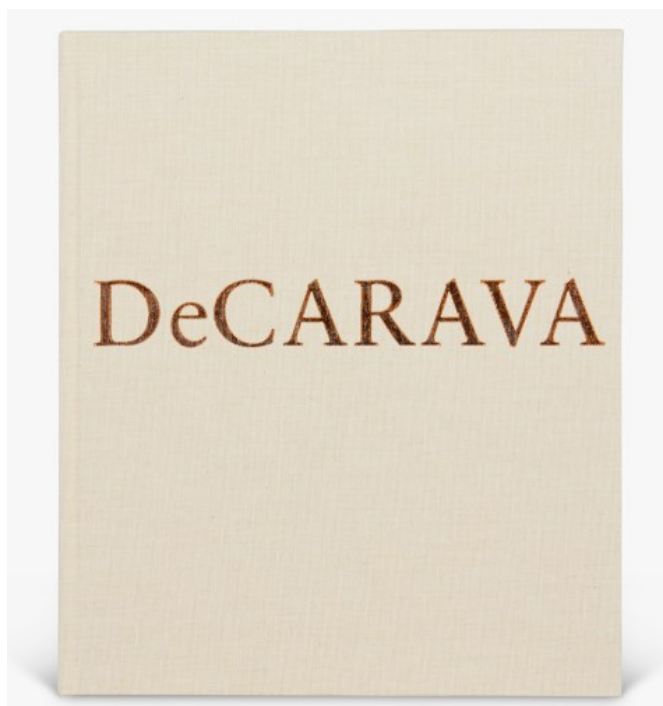
Image: "The New Black Vanguard: Photography Between Art and Fashion," By Antwaun Srgent (Aperture, \$304 pages). | Published Oct. 29, 2019

Published in conjunction with an exhibition at the Aperture Foundation in New York, "The New Black Vanguard: Photography Between Art and Fashion" introduces 15 young photographers forging impressive careers in the fashion world. Celebrating the black body, their striking images are redefining beauty. "Untitled (Hijab Couture), New York" (2019) by Tyler Mitchell appears on the cover of the fully illustrated volume. The stunning portrait features model Ugbad Abdi wearing a pink head covering blanketed with soft sculptural flowers. When Beyoncé graced the cover of American Vogue's fall fashion issue in September 2018, she was photographed by Atlanta-born, Brooklyn-based Mitchell. The assignment made history. Incredibly, Mitchell, then 23, was the first black photographer to shoot the magazine's cover. His singular feat has brought attention to a new generation of image makers. Mitchell, along with Campbell Addy, Arielle Bobb-Willis, Micaiah Carter, Awol Erizku, Quil Lemons, Daniel Obasi, Ruth Ossai, and Dana Scruggs, among others, are using fashion photography as an aesthetic and political vehicle,

bringing visibility to their practices and their subjects. Their work has appeared in outlets such as Artforum, GQ, Allure, Wall St. Journal, Financial Times, i-D, Interview, Playboy, The New Yorker, New York magazine, W magazine, and international editions of Vogue. "The pictures and their makers are part of a new black vanguard of photographers who are working internationally, across the African diaspora, and using their cameras to create contemporary portrayals of black life that are reframing established representational paradigms," author Antwaun Sargent writes in the essay that opens the book. The photographers hail from New York, Atlanta, California, Chicago, Africa, and Europe. Sargent writes briefly about each artist and further explores their work with a portfolio of images. Conversations among Sargent and a selection of the photographers with Shaniqwa Jarvis, Mickalene Thomas, and Deborah Willis, conclude the volume.

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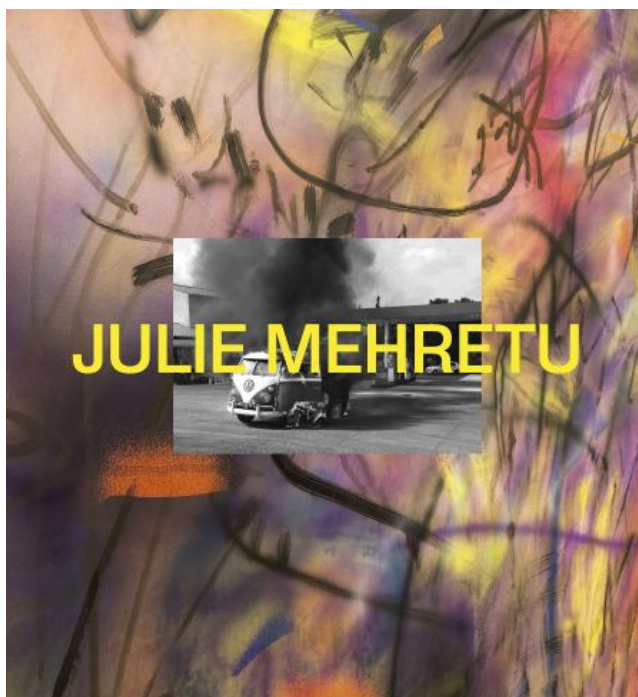
*Image: "Roy DeCarava: Light Break," Preface by Zoé Whitley, with an introduction and text by Sherry Turner DeCarava (David Zwirner Books, 228 pages). | Published Nov. 5, 2019*

This catalog accompanied "Roy DeCarava: Light Break," a survey exhibition celebrating the centennial of the artist's birth at David Zwirner Gallery in New York City. "DeCarava" is pressed into the front cover of the cloth-bound volume in copper foil lettering. The same treatment is applied to the back cover in silver foil. At once spare and elegant, the minimalist approach continues on the interior where the black-and-white photographs of Roy DeCarava (1919-2009) take center stage. The array of images dating from 1948 to 2006, showcase his dexterity with light and shadow and commitment to printing techniques that produced a full spectrum of rich tonal grays. DeCarava's subject is Harlem, the neighborhood where he grew up. He combines "formal acuity with an intimate and deeply

human treatment of his subjects," training his lens on people (intimate moments, close-ups, and wide angle perspectives), natural and architectural landscapes, and abstract compositions. The preface is by Zoé Whitley and Sherry Turner DeCarava contributes the introduction and an essay titled "Celebration." Turner DeCarava is the late photographer's wife. An art historian, she manages his estate. She notes that he rarely spoke publicly about his work. Her writing highlights and quotes "some of his prescient thoughts, gathered from forty years of conversations and interviews..."

*Image: "Julie Mehretu," by Christine Y. Kim and Rujeko Hockley, with contributions from Andrianna Campbell, Fred Moten, Adrienne Edwards, Leslie Jones, Dagmawi Woubshet, Mathew Hale, and afterword by Thelma Golden (Prestel, 320 pages). | Hardcover, Published Nov. 15, 2019*

Over the past 25 years, Julie Mehretu has been making complex abstract paintings informed by geographical maps and architectural schematics, referencing LaGuardia Airport and European ruins, and invoking geopolitics, displacement, and much more. Some works explode with color; Others are strictly gray and black. Hints of figuration have shown up recently. Layering and mark making remain a constant. A long time coming, "Julie Mehretu" compiles for the first time a comprehensive overview of the artist's expansive and evolving body of work made from 1996 to the present. Accompanying her first full-scale retrospective, co-organized by the Los





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Angeles County Museum of Art and Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the generously illustrated volume reproduces her vast paintings and meticulous drawings, including many full-page detail images. Writings by co-curators Christine Y. Kim and Rujeko Hockley, among several others, explore Mehretu's practice and unpack the content and meaning embedded in her work. Kim's four-part chronological essay traces the development of the artist's various series and major works. Each section begins with a fascinating "visual archive," a collage of images compiled by Mehretu charting her sources and inspirations and giving insight into her process.

Image: "Member: Pope.L, 1978-2001" Edited by Stuart Comer and Danielle Jackson, with a foreword by Glenn D. Lowry, and text contributions by many others (Museum of Modern Art, 144 pages). | Published Nov. 19, 2019

Artist Pope.L has crawled through Times Square wearing a suit, crawled through the snow wearing a Superman costume, chained himself to the door of an ATM wearing a skirt of money, and sat on a toilet eating the Wall Street Journal. A legendary provocateur, his performances are absurd, comical, and troubling. His aim is to surface the realities of American life—uncomfortable economic, social, and political truths; and the yawning gaps between living while black and white. Published in conjunction with his survey at the Museum of Modern Art, "member: Pope.L, 1978-2001" examines 13 early works, street interventions and experimental theater that largely defined his career. Each of the iconic works is explored and explained in this volume with documentary photographs and brief essay contributions from artists and curators including Naomi Beckwith, Adrienne Edwards, Malik Gaines, EJ Hill, Thomas J. Lax, Valerie Cassel Oliver, and Martine Syms. An essential primer on Pope.L, his subversive branding is embedded in the design. A small hole has been punched out of the center of the book and, permanently dog-eared, the bottom right hand corner of volume is missing entirely.

