

## Museum of Fine Arts, Houston showcases soulful portraits of black power

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Lorraine O'Grady, *Art Is... (Girlfriends Times Two)*, 1983/2009, c-print in 40 parts, edition of 8 + 1 AP, courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York. © Lorraine O'Grady / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY Image courtesy of the Artist

In April, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston will showcase a colorful dose of soul.

**“Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power”** will be on display at the museum from Sunday, April 26 through Sunday, July 19. This marks the final

presentation of the exhibition, organized by Tate Modern in London, which has been on tour for the past three years. A related film series will also run during the exhibition.

“We are enormously privileged to serve as the final venue for this landmark exhibition, which has received tremendous acclaim since its debut in London for its path-breaking exploration of the art of this pivotal era,” said Gary Tinterow, MFAH director and the Margaret Alkek Williams Chair, in a statement.

Organized into 13 sections, the exhibition features artists from across the United States, exploring what it meant to be a black artist in America during the tumultuous era that spanned the 1960s and the Civil Rights movement to the early 1980s and the emergence of identity politics.

A special emphasis will be on aligned groups that evolved in New York (like Spiral, who formed in response to the March on Washington in 1963), Chicago (the Organization of Black American Culture, AfriCOBRA), and Los Angeles, and another focus on the work of L.A.-based artist Betye Saar, who peppered her pieces with references to ancestral connectedness, ritual objects and spiritual power .

Several notable moments and landmarks will be touched on during this exhibit. The Black Power movement will be represented in such pieces as Archibald Motley’s painting *The First One Hundred Years: He Amongst You Who Is Without Sin Shall Cast the First Stone; Forgive Them Father for They Know Not What They Do* (c. 1963–72) and Elizabeth Catlett’s wooden sculpture *Black Unity* (1968), while the after-effects of the 1965 Watts Rebellion can be seen in Noah Purifoy’s assemblage *Watts Riot* (1966), made from collaged debris.

The East Coast certainly gets a lot of love, as Roy DeCarava's black-and-white photographs, abstract pieces from such artists as Sam Gilliam, Peter Bradley, and William T. Williams and photos from Lorraine O'Grady's 1983 performance at the African-American Day Parade in Harlem will be featured prominently.

The presentation will also have a section featuring a number of works (from the museum’s permanent collection) which spotlight Houston’s vital, African-American art scene during this period. Artists featured in this section include painter/printmaker

John Biggers and sculptor Carroll Harris Simms, who established an art program in the '50s at what is now Texas Southern University.

“I am especially thrilled to be able to highlight the work of Houston artists in the final presentation of this exhibition,” said Kanitra Fletcher, the museum's modern and contemporary art assistant curator, in a press release. “This new section contributes to a more comprehensive representation of black American art during the same era, and celebrates an important legacy of art making in Texas.”