

BEARING WITNESS

Drop everything and go see the Blanton's new exhibit, *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties*

BY [KATIE FRIEL](#) 2.10.15 | 12:44 pm



Malcolm X Holding up Black Muslim Newspaper Photo by Gordon Parks/Blanton Museum of Art

An arresting new exhibit chronicling the art and artists behind the Civil Rights Movement is set to open at the Blanton Museum of Art — and it's a can't-miss event for all Austinites. [Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties](#), which runs from February 15 through May 10, chronicles the anger, triumph and social upheaval of 1960s America.

Originally organized by the [Brooklyn Museum](#), *Witness* features approximately 100 works from artists such as Barkley Hendricks, Charles White, Andy Warhol, May Stevens, Philip Guston, Jack Whitten, Richard Avedon, Romare Bearden and Faith Ringgold.

"[*Witness*] makes the case for African American artists who questioned the role of artists within the Civil Rights Movement," says Evan Garza, assistant curator of modern and contemporary art at the Blanton. "They were artists that have been largely overlooked by the white art establishment of the 20th century ... And



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a number of artists are experiencing a renaissance, like Jack Whitten."

Ranging from the heartbreaking to the stunning, pieces like Whitten's *Birmingham 1964*, Norman Rockwell's portrait of Lyndon B. Johnson and [video of Nina Simone's](#) harrowing call-to-action hymn, "Mississippi Goddam," not only chronicle the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-20th century, but the fight still going on today.

"*Witness* is incredibly relevant in 2015 for a number of reasons, specifically the cultural relevance of the events surrounding Ferguson and the [#blacklivesmatter](#) movement," says Garza. "The notion that we have to create a hashtag to emphasize that [black lives matter] is indicative of the ... incredible duration of the Civil Rights Movement. That fight isn't over."

The exhibit is timed to coincide with the 51st anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, which came before the U.S. Senate on March 30, 1964 and was eventually signed into law on July 2, 1964 by President Johnson. Garza says the Blanton's version of *Witness* has the added benefit of sharing a campus with the LBJ Presidential Library.

"We've been able to partner with LBJ Library in a way that honors his legacy," says Garza. "It's exciting for us to partner and make this presentation of *Witness* at the Blanton the most 'Austin' version [possible]."

In addition to the exhibit, the Blanton will play host to a series of events honoring and chronicling the Civil Rights Movement including a discussion on February 22 at 2 pm with artist Jack Whitten and *Witness* co-curator Kellie Jones, an associate professor in the Department of Art, Art History and Archeology at Columbia University. The Blanton will also co-host a panel discussion on the Civil Rights Movement in the auditorium at the LBJ Presidential Library on April 8 at 6 pm.