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Reinventing Black Visibility in Contemporary Art

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Abstract

Artists Kerry James Marshall, Kara Walker, and Peter Brathwaite visualize new narratives navigating Black visibility in the twenty-first century. Their work pursues topics such as race and representation, reflecting their continual need for conversation in our contemporary socio-political climate. Marshall's reinvention of the color black used for pigmentation makes clear the simplification of race and color while inserting Black people into art history using well-known motifs from Western art. Walker appropriates, deconstructs, and recontextualizes antebellum caricatures of Black people through silhouettes that blur the lines between black and white and conflate our past and modern conceptions of race. Marshall and Walker's artwork provides context for the largely unresearched artist Brathwaite and his Twitter series #RediscoveringBlack-Portraiture. After the Getty Museum launched the #GettyMuseumChallenge during the COVID-19 pandemic, performance artist Brathwaite began exploring visual art by placing himself into famous works recreated with photography for social media. All three artists explicitly incorporate themes of identity and reflect on what it means to be Black during a contemporary movement which diverges from framing art around race. By contextualizing Marshall's, Walker's, and Brathwaite's work within past genres, this paper identifies ways these three artists are reacting to historical conventions, as well as contemporary dialogue surrounding race, and fellow artists.

Introduction

"Black is described as (a) of the very darkest color, and (b) relating to a human group having dark-colored skin, especially of African or Australian Aboriginal ancestry," according to scholar Jessie L. Whitehead.[i] This notion of "black" functioning as both a

color and race has been especially prevalent since the Civil Rights movement when activist groups transitioned to using “Black” because of its symbolic representation of “racial pride, militancy, power, and rejection of the status quo.”[ii] Using this concept, I will explore ways in which Black artists are responding to their historic invisibility in Western art by making Blackness visible in their own work.[iii] This thesis seeks to uncover how these artists find new methods of intervention, critique, and appropriation, as well as how they insert personal history into canonical works.

American artists Kerry James Marshall (b. 1955) and Kara Walker (b. 1969), and British artist Peter Brathwaite (b. 1983)[iv] provide unique perspectives, artistic experimentations, and powerful messages about what it means to be a Black person making art in the contemporary world. I aim to investigate works that center Black invisibility as well as highlight how these artists are engaging with historical artistic and literary concepts. By being almost a generation apart each, we can better understand where these artists cross-over and diverge from one another and how these questions are still important decades later. This research is not an assertion as to what Black artists should be creating but instead presents three artists who grapple with race, identity, and representation in their artwork.[v]

Discourse surrounding what Black artists are “supposed” to create has most recently been debated through the “post-Black” genre.[vi] From the early 2000s until now, the term “post-Black” has been used to describe artwork that moves past the concept of “Black art” and the rigidity that race brings to creating art. Unintentionally coined in an interview by curator Thelma Golden and artist Glenn Ligon, “post-Black” originally referred to the art in *Freestyle,* an exhibition in 2001 at the Studio Museum in Harlem. “Post-Black” popped up in the late 90s in artistic circles, but had not been used in a mainstream way until this show.[vii]

Although the term has since been more broadly used to describe art that encapsulated a frustration within post-Civil Rights Movement Black artists, in particular art dealing with the historical monolithic narrative of Black people, it highlights the contemporary need to create new narratives. As Yale Assistant Professor Nana Adusei-Poku asserts:

> The term post-black reprised a centuries-old desire to envision a multiplicitist, nuanced, and untethered Blackness freed from both the gratuitous violence and structural oppression that brought it into being. Post-black art acknowledged and created a hybrid space for being Black in the arts.[viii]

The genre allows for critical dialogue between artists and past movements while also pushing for a new relationship between race and art.[ix] Post-Black art holds both the idea that artists are freeing themselves of racial labels while also still remaining, “steeped, in fact deeply interested, in redefining complex notions of blackness.”[x]

It is important to note the use of “post” here as this recalls other movements such as Postmodernism, which was created as a reaction to what came before it. This implies an inherent responsiveness and acknowledgment of historical art movements that even with the intention of breaking apart from, still links this genre to the past. Kansas State University Professor Cameron Leader-Picone writes that:

> [...] Golden specifically contrasts ‘post-black art’ with the aesthetic principles of the Black Arts Movement to contrast a generational term emphasizing individual artistic agency over the meaning of racial identity. Post-Blackness underscores the simultaneous turn towards the privileging of individual agency over racial identity and expression and concurrent recognition of the continued centrality of race in contemporary American society [...] Golden’s short essay serves as the first major document of the post era, taking the turn of the century as an opportunity to rearticulate the meaning of Black identity and its relationship to the production of art.[xi]

Grappling with the discourse of “Black art” versus “art,” especially found in the post-Black movement, was the original inspiration for this thesis. Although Marshall, Walker, and Brathwaite do not explicitly identify as post-Black artists, their careers have all intersected with this discourse. Even with a movement aimed at eliminating the need for identity, there are still artists who feel the need to talk about it. Identity is dynamic, ever-changing, and constantly shaped by interpersonal and outside socio-political relationships. Marshall, Walker, and Brathwaite all revive the questions posed by post-Black and earlier movements surrounding race and identity within art by using the visual medium as a form of dialogue. From painting to silhouettes to photography, these artists carefully compose, explore, push-back, and bring forth new ideas about what “Black” looks like.

An Intervention on the Color “Black”

Professor and artist Kerry James Marshall has worked with a wide variety of media including drawings, collages, murals, and comic books, but is most widely known for his:

> [...] large, allegorical, allusive paintings invigorated by a complex conceptual weave of personal and social history, African American popular culture, African diasporan folk material, and a refreshing sense of awe and challenge in the face of Western painting’s daunting historical legacy.[xii]

Having lived in Birmingham, Los Angeles, and Chicago, his work encompasses the “symbolic weight” of each location, pulling from historical events such as the Civil Rights Movement as well as continual themes of invisibility and visibility; presence and absence.[xiii] His language of painting deals with not only loss and struggle but more importantly, hope and opportunity—the joy that continues to prevail.

Marshall is most well-known for how he paints his Black figures. Drawing on his experiences as an art history professor as well as both a viewer and creator of art, he deliberately paints with proficient knowledge of canonical works and Black invisibility in art. "If you look around the museum, you recognize there's an absence of black figures. I don't expect those people to have made pictures about me because I wasn't a part of that culture and I wasn't a part of that history. I have to be able to project my self-image in such a way that I can guarantee myself a place on these walls,” Marshall tells the Seattle Art Museum.[xiv]

In turn, Marshall guarantees himself a place on museum walls through his additions to the collective history: painting “Black” in a particularly unique way. Instead of depicting his Black figures with shades of brown as most artists have typically done, he uses a range of blue-black for his skin tones—thus equating the color “black” to the racial group of “Black” people. This conflation of color and race is used by Marshall to critique our conception of what “Black” looks like.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self

Marshall’s 1980 *A Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self* (Fig. 1) is considered to be “the single most important picture of his life,” according to Chicago MCA Curator Dieter Roelstraete.[xv] Considering that Marshall’s work up until that point had been primarily abstraction, this figurative painting marked a turning point in the artist’s career.[xvi] In the middle of Postmodernism’s rejection of realism, Marshall asserts a need to reconsider its value. This painting showcases Marshall’s emphasis on presence and absence, as it is made up almost entirely of shades of black.[xvii] Marshall writes that he “[...] was playing at the boundary between a completely flattened-out stereotype, a cartoon, and a fully resonant, complicated, authentic representation - a black archetype, which is a very different thing.”[xviii]

Figure 1. Kerry James Marshall, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self* (1980). Egg tempera on paper; 8 x 6 1/2 in, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. https://www.artsy.net/artwork/kerry-james-marshall-a-portrait-of-the-artist-as-a-shadow-of-his-former-self.

Inspired by Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, Marshall seeks “to make the invisible visible, to look at the overlooked.”[xix] Marshall describes in his essay “Notes on Career and Work” that Ellison moves out of the literal invisibility of H.G. Well’s *The Invisible Man* towards a more “psychological and perceptual” understanding that is defined by

"the political and social realities of America."[xx] Using a self-portrait as the start of an investigation into how this socio-political understanding can be translated into art that allows him the safety of working within his own identity rather than trying to make it applicable to all. However, his own self can be used as a "stand-in" for more complex ideas.[xxi] Looking at stereotypes surrounding Black people, Marshall was able to intrinsically understand how they made him feel, and then turn those feelings into a work that reflects the most simplified version of these negative conceptions.

This small egg tempera painting on paper details the bust of an essentially completely black figure. He wears some sort of sweater, the same shade as his face, and a simple white shirt with one of the buttons peeking out from underneath the outer layer. On top of his head sits a cowboy hat, but the edges are blurred with the forehead of the figure. His body appears almost geometric, constructed mostly out of large swaths of the same shade. We can only see certain features like the stark whites of his eyes and the outline of his mouth created by the bright teeth and gums inside (although one of his teeth is missing, leaving a large black hole).

This color palette, used consistently throughout his works, was "developed from an investigation into the invisibility of blacks in America and the negative connotations associated with darkness," scholar Jessie L. Whitehead writes.[xxii] Whitehead goes on to say that "[t]he extreme blackness of the figures is [Marshall's] way of visually representing this state of invisibility in which 'you could sometimes be seen and not seen at the same time.'"[xxiii] The minimal tones used for the figure paired together with the dark background make him almost disappear—as if he's invisible. Marshall plays on the way racism simplifies our understanding of different types of people by limiting the dimension of the work and thus our understanding of the figure.

We can assert that this portrait is of Marshall considering the title references "the artist," although the figure does not seemingly resemble Marshall at first glance. His use of the word "shadow" directly correlates with the colors used for the portrait and a sense of double identity within the artist. This idea of double-consciousness comes back to Du Bois' ideas surrounding an "inner 'twoness'" experienced by Black Americans.[xxiv] A shadow tends to be something unnoticed, but always present just like the visibility of Blackness in the world.

Figure 2. (left)
Figure 3. (center)
Figure 4. (right)
All pulled from:

Jaffe, Logan. “Confronting Racist Objects.” The New York Times, December 9, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/12/09/us/confronting-racist-objects.html.

The title and “sardonic grin” [xxv] of the portrait can also be connected to the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce. Roelstraete asserts in his chapter that the figure’s “sardonic grin” resembles that of James Joyce’s portrait on the cover of his novel,[xxvi] but curator Terrie Sultan in “This Is the Way We Live” also argues that the “bugged-out eyes and gleaming white teeth” resemble the “Sambo caricature”[xxvii] defined by Henry Louis Gates (see Figs. 2, 3, 4 for reference). She also reinforces the personal connection that Marshall has in his work by referencing the movie *Mr. Sardonic* (Fig. 5) that Marshall watched when he was a child depicting a scene of a “[...] decomposed body whose face is frozen into a cartoonish skeleton grin.” [xxviii] These references to both literature and historical-artistic conventions are what Marshall most aptly interweaves into his art.

Figure 5. *Mr. Sardonicus*. 1961. *IMDB*. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0055200/mediaviewer/rm848486913/.

Many Mansions

Marshall not only draws upon historical references but also real-life events that have happened around him. The first of his lifesize five-part series, *Many Mansions* (1994) is a response to the 1950s and '60s public housing projects in Los Angeles and Chicago and for this particular piece—Stateway Gardens (Fig. 6). This painting depicts three figures in various positions working on the flowerbeds located in front of a background of the housing buildings. Marshall depicts the irony of the use of the word “garden”—something typically associated with growth, vibrance, and life—when in reality these projects ultimately failed as a solution to the growing issue of housing

(especially in historically Black neighborhoods such as Bronzeville where this project was located).[xxix]

Figure 6. Kerry James Marshall, *Many Mansions* (1994). Acrylic and collage on unstretched canvas; 114 × 135 in, Art Institute of Chicago. https://www.artic.edu/artworks/137125/many-mansions.

The bright red of the ribbon that frames the top of the artwork stands out at first glance. Written in white text along the ribbon is: “IN MOTHER’S HOUSE THERE ARE MANY MANSIONS”[xxx] (although the words “many man” are covered by a flat white cloud at the top right).[xxxi] The baby blue sky is limited to just a fraction of the top of the painting, behind the tall yellow-white buildings we can assume are part of the housing project. Just a little off-center stands a welcome sign, its stark white shape contrasting with the deep red and green trees and bushes decorating the back and middle ground of the painting. The text is obscured by an abstract bundle of white flowers positioned in front of it, but the phrase “WELCOME TO STATEWAY GARDENS” is somewhat legible. More context to the location of these buildings is provided by a seal of the Chicago Housing Authority at the bottom of the sign.[xxxii] Two bluebirds reminiscent of a Disney princess cartoon fly in front of it, each holding one end of a bright blue ribbon that reads: “BLESS OUR HAPPY HOME.” All of these elements come together to signal a perfection to the scene, something that could be tied up with a bow: a “blessed landscape.”[xxxiii]

Three Black male figures dominate the central space of the canvas, forming a triangle. Each of the figures’ features are lined with a lighter grey, softly defining the edges of their hands and the contours of their face (the only visible parts of their bodies). Their faces are neutral, eyes heavy—almost as if they are bored. The men look like they are dressed for something much more formal than planting a garden, but it is up to the viewer to decide whether it’s celebratory or funerary wear. The left figure (I will refer to him as figure #1) kneels on the ground, working on the flower bush beside him. The most central man (figure #2) stands facing towards us, bending slightly to the right to move the rake he’s holding over the flower bed below him. He looks accusingly at the

viewer, the only one to break the fourth wall. Figure #3, or the farthest to the right, faces almost entirely away from us. He bends at the waist with his left leg raised as if he's bracing it on something in the flower bed he towers over.

Each figure has some sort of black pool beneath their body. Figure #1 sits on it almost like a picnic blanket. The pool under figure #2 is drawn like a shadow beneath his feet and figure #3 has a black pool beneath his head—although it is also connected with a bush behind them. Marshall, in an interview with Calvin Reid for *BOMB,* mentions how the flower beds are shaped to look like graves, as if the figures are digging their own.[xxxiv] But the black pools, or shadows, are abstracted in a way that makes them stick out more because of their harsh outlines and appear as if they are the blood of the figures. Both shapes work in tandem to signal that something deeply grave is happening here. Marshall elaborates more on this potential for multiple meanings in his interview by saying:

> Yeah, what I wanted to show in those paintings is that whatever you think about the projects, they're that and more. If you think they're full of hopelessness and despair, you're wrong. There are actually a lot of opportunities to experience pleasure in the projects [...] I wanted to try and communicate in those paintings how much more complex those projects and the people who live there actually are.[xxxv]

He moves between the geometric lines of the figures and the organic abstraction of the flowers that cover portions of the image with the clean and polished figures contrasting against the quick and dripping shapes painted beneath or on top of them.[xxxvi] His use of abstraction in a seemingly real scenario comments on the materiality of the event he is depicting and creates tension between the two messages he plays around with—that even in the failure of the Stateway Gardens, joy can also be found.

School of Beauty, School of Culture

Another life-size fictional scene, *School of Beauty, School of Culture* (2012; Fig. 7) is densely packed with color, symbolism, and narrative—just like *Many Mansions*. By using the real-world setting of the beauty salon, Marshall is able to create a fictional narrative that comments on a collective experience traditionally made invisible. This painting depicts ten figures, two children, and a self-portrait of the artist in one of the mirrors.[xxxvii] The composition is split horizontally in two due to the hard vertical lines of the wall and horizontal lines of the floor as well as the contrasting colors green and red. Three large rectangular fluorescent lights hang from a ceiling and reflect off of the glittery decor that dangles and loops around the salon. A central and vertical black mirror leans against the wall framed by two gilded heart mirrors to the left and another heart mirror and a much larger poster to the right. These mirrors sit atop salon stations where clients and hairdressers are posed in action.

Figure 7. Kerry James Marshall, *School of Beauty, School of Culture* (2012). Acrylic and glitter on unstretched canvas; 8 ft. 11 7/8 in. × 13 ft. 1 7/8 in, Birmingham Museum of Art. https://www.artsbma.org/may-2013-spotlight/.

Posters related to the Black is Beautiful movement from the 1960s cover the walls. From left to right: "ULTRA GLOW. COLOR CHANGES EVERYTHING. SKIN FOR YOU TO LOVE. Beauty. Love," "THE COLOR OF SEDUCTION. DARK. REMARKABLE. LOVELY,"[xxxviii] and "It's Your HAIR! Love DARK. COLOR CHANGES. Lovely."[xxxix] Above the central rectangular mirror are two posters—one being Ms. Lauren Hill's vinyl "Ex-Factor" signed "One Love, Lauren Hill." [xl] To the right of the album is a smaller black and white portrait of Marshall's wife and actress, Cheryl Bruce, signed "Love Always, Cheryl."[xli] It is important to note that these two portraits seem to watch over the figures below from their high placement in the painting. Considering how important these women are in Black culture and Marshall's personal life, they are both people to look up to (literally and metaphorically) as well as potentially watching over the beauty of the salon and the figures embracing themselves below.

I reference all of these elements because the word "love" appears over and over throughout this piece. The notion of love is even reinforced by the heart mirrors that frame a client's face as they look into the mirror for the first time, revealing their new hairstyle or cut. This is significant since historically Black women were not taught to love their bodies, their skin, or their hair. Professor Tracey Owens Patton asserts that "[...] body image, skin color, and hair haunt the existence and psychology of Black women, especially since one common U.S. societal stereotype is the belief that Black women fail to measure up to the normative standard."[xlii] In the context of this beauty salon, we see affirmations that dark is beautiful, to feel comfortable in one's skin, and to be confident in your hair.

Also seen across the reflection in the mirrors is a large banner that takes up the length of the picture depicting fragments of the title. The large words are written atop the three horizontal strips of the banner, red, black, and green: the colors of the Pan-African

flag.[xliii] These colors are amplified throughout the piece by the green walls, red floors, and the black used for the drawers and skin tone of the figures. Underneath the first part of the banner in the reflection of the mirror is a clock with concentric circles in the same color as the banner. However instead of the typical numbers we would see around the edge of the clock, letters replace them reading “NATION TIME.” This is the title of Joe McPhee’s song whose chorus rings “What time is it? It’s nation time!” released in 1971 during the Black Power Movement which “emphasized racial pride, economic empowerment, and the creation of political and cultural institutions.”[xliv] This movement created visibility for Black people in the U.S. and coincided with the Black Arts Movement.

Marshall uses the interactions between the figures to recreate aspects from canonical works of art. Examples such as a woman posed in *contrapposto* harken back to statues like Donatello’s *David*, or the artist's self-portrait in one of the mirrors resembles those from paintings such as Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* (1656) or the *Arnolfini Portrait* by Jan van Eyck (1434). Another reference is the group of six figures that take up the right side of the painting, somewhat circled around an extended salon chair with a client leaning back into a shampoo bowl.[xlv] Katherine Ladd in an article for the Birmingham Museum of Art asserts that this configuration resembles Rembrandt van Rijn’s *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632).[xlvi] She says that this moment “[n]ot only teaches a trade but also educates its clientele about African American culture through fellowship.”[xlvii] What we notice at this point is Marshall’s calculated reinvention of canonical works of art that he most likely would be teaching in his art history courses that primarily depict white men.

The most notable reference is to Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* (1533). Instead of the *memento mori* skull, Marshall replaces the anamorphic image with the head of Aurora, the Disney Princess otherwise known as “Sleeping Beauty.” This stylized image, which at first glance appears very out of place, becomes a part of two small children’s reality as they interact on either side of it while everyone else appears oblivious. Disney princesses have historically been predominantly white and the fact that Marshall chose “Sleeping Beauty” reinforces this notion that white, blonde, and blue-eyed is the underlying (or “sleeping”) beauty standard.

The little boy to the left of Aurora peers under as if curious to see how this image floats on its side. The little girl on the right looks towards the teaching group, but extends her hand, almost touching the princess’ bangs. By posing Sleeping Beauty as an anamorphic image, Professor Marie Porterfield poses the question of what if “[Marshall’s] type of glittering princess ideal of beauty is a distortion from the lived experience of many?”[xlviii] The fact that the children are the ones engaging with the image shows us that these ideals of beauty are taught from a young age and possibly go unnoticed as we get older, becoming subconscious parts of our reality.

Marshall is incredibly intentional when it comes to composing his work. His deep knowledge as an art history teacher of the Western art canon allows him to weave in and out of its conventions, creating his own narratives that both play on and diverge from historical works. Drawing from the personal and historical in order to tell a narrative is not only limited to Marshall; many of his contemporaries, such as Kara Walker, also combine a psychological and physical aspect when approaching their work.

Reconstructing Black Caricatures

Born in California, Kara Walker began working with her renowned cut-out silhouettes during her time as a graduate student at the Rhode Island School of Design.[xlix] Her artistic debut happened at a Drawing Center group exhibition in 1994 where she showed *Gone: An Historical Romance of a Civil War as It Occurred b'tween the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart*, a 25-foot long silhouette installation piece. As a multidisciplinary artist, Walker experiments with many mediums including installation work, drawing, film, painting, text, and shadow puppets. Her breadth of work has won recognition globally including the MacArthur Fellowship at age twenty-eight.

Walker describes her work as exposing "the ongoing psychological injury caused by the tragic legacy of slavery."[l] Her art is profoundly interwoven with historical literary and artistic connections, binding and solidifying her pieces into a past that many try to forget. These methods of intervention link her in many ways to Marshall's work, which also relies on historical literary, and artistic devices. However, her work faces much more criticism than Marshall's for its controversial and often derogatory images. As Michael D. Harris describes in his book, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*:

> Her work is uniquely brilliant, timely, essential, and disturbing in unusual ways. In an uncanny way, she has created in her work a confluence of race, taste, sexual mores, the excess of contemporary art, and the postmodernist trend toward eradicating the boundaries between popular culture and high art.[li]

But Walker's storytelling methods have long caused controversy, especially regarding the way she portrays Black people in her work. Artists like Betye Saar have said her work is "revolting and negative and a form of betrayal to the slaves, particularly woman and children, and that it was basically for the amusement and the investment of the white art establishment."[lii]

While Walker is well-known for her exploration into gender, race, violence, and sexuality, she is also often misrepresented as an artist.[liii] Scholars and critics alike tend to conflate her biography with her work when in fact she believes that her art is "[...] just a story. It has no relation to the truth of who I am or how I came to be."[liv] It is important to acknowledge the connection of an artist to their art without intertwining the two. That being said, Walker's figures are often Black women, and the persona she has said to take on in connection to her artwork doesn't help to separate her from her work. Art Historian Dan Cameron describes in his article "Kara Walker: Rubbing History the Wrong Way" how Walker's artistic alter-ego "is based on actual slaves' testimonies, and who eagerly shoulders the double challenge of surviving history and representing it."[lv] Walker is thoroughly invested yet claims to be distanced from her work, both taking on the personification of her art while also calling it fictional. Regardless of their figural and fictional representations, both she and Marshall have deep psychological ties to their work.

Walker's ties in particular relate to her deep understanding and immersion in the antebellum period, especially the usage of silhouette cut-outs as her primary medium.

Silhouettes historically have been “used to depict an endearing subject” which she then “upends this tradition by using silhouettes to represent the violence of slavery.”[lvi] Art Historian Dan Cameron states that “Walker’s choice of this old-fashioned technique of rendering figures, trees, houses, etc., creates a sense of historical distance.”[lvii] These silhouettes thus inverse, recontextualize and reappropriate antebellum caricatures.[lviii] Walker inverts these “endearing” images by depicting the people denied access to them. She recontextualizes them by using them in a larger artistic setting (like an installation). These images are then reappropriated as they are strictly the outlines of caricatures of Black people.

Look Away, Look Away, Look Away!

The silhouette cut-out piece *Look Away, Look Away, Look Away!* (Fig. 8) was installed on three walls at the Hessel Museum of Art in 1995. Walker carves out figures from black paper and adheres them in multiple arrangements on each wall depending on the location of the installation. This allows for the story and depictions to change according to their new arrangement. Not only do her caricatures directly reference racial stereotypes, but as Cameron points out, “Walker’s formal use of black/white contrast as a kind of heightened code for racial relations.”[lix] Her medium is intentional as well as the enormity of her installations which have been compared to that of grand manner painting.[lx] Being life-size, these cut-outs could be perceived as shadows of the people in the gallery. As one walks in front of the walls illuminated by bright lights above, their own shadows intermingle with the monochromatic forms thus inserting them into the scenario portrayed.

Figure 8. Kara Walker, Look Away! Look Away! Look Away! (1995). Cut paper on adhesive wall; 156 in. x 540 in, Marieluise Hessel Collection. https://ccs.bard.edu/museum/collection/98-look-away-look-away-look-away.

The use of her silhouettes especially relates to what Walker defines as “the romance novel tradition” which later in history transitions to “the supermarket with a pornographic admiration of the affects of 19th-century personage—and an underlying

subtext of Blackness as a tool of seduction."[lxi] Her *BOMB* article about the installation goes on to discuss the implications of Historical Romances being a "byproduct of self-hatred, internalized sexism, and a remarkable kind of racism, the kind that makes one comfortable enough with it to become lustful for it."[lxii]

Figure 9. Billy Van, the monologue comedian, 1900. This image is available from the United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs division under the digital ID var.1831
https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/blackface-birth-american-stereotype

As a reference to minstrel shows, Walker entitles this piece after a lyric from the song "Dixie," written by a white man for his troupe "Bryant's Minstrels."[lxiii] Minstrel Shows, popular in the 19th century, were at their core racist and derogatory performances of Black people (Fig. 9). These minstrel shows were ironically more popular in the North, where white people didn't have as much interaction with Black people as in the South.[lxiv] Dinah Holtzman describes how this song relates to Walker's own life as she has talked about running north (towards her graduate school).[lxv] Holtzman goes on to illuminate how the song's lyrics sexualizing Black women are translated into this installation by depicting a "potential rape of a female slave."[lxvi] She asserts that the enslaved woman hanging from the tree interacts with the hat of her master who stands in front of his wife and her maid (Fig. 10).[lxvii] Her legs are spread and open to her master's gaze, which could suggest "that Civil War defeat metaphorically transformed the South into a black female body vulnerable to all manner of violation."[lxviii] Through her "alter-ego," which parallels directly to her images, Walker continuously relates herself to her work while also proclaiming to stand apart from it.

Figure 10. Installation view of *Look Away! Look Away! Look Away!! Kara Walker*, CCS Bard Galleries, 1995. Photo: Doug Baz
https://ccs.bard.edu/museum/exhibitions/196-look-away-look-away-look-away-kara-walker

The National Museum of African American History and Culture writes that "[b]y distorting the features and culture of African Americans—including their looks, language, dance, deportment, and character—white Americans were able to codify whiteness across class and geopolitical lines as its antithesis."[lxix] In turn, Walker pulls from these performances to create her designs for silhouettes. Depicted in tattered clothing in hypersexual and at many times violent scenarios, these stereotypes created enforced through minstrel shows help formulate how Walker portrays her figures.[lxx] She uses the "humor" they presented and replicates it in her work, causing us to reflect on our own presumptions, stereotypes, and relationships with race.[lxxi] Considering that Blackface is still very much alive today, Walker utilizes these seemingly historic images of Black people in order for us to confront our socio-political contemporary reality.[lxxii]

The Katastwóf Karavan

The Katastwóf Karavan (2018), a sculptural wagon, is made up of a steam calliope and Walker's signature silhouettes and was exhibited in 2019 and 2022 (Fig. 11).[lxxiii] Standing at roughly twelve by eight feet, the steel frame covered in aluminum, red oak, and muslin wall panels rests on four wooden wheels. Each side is covered in silhouettes: three sides with black-on-white backgrounds, and one end with a white outline on a black backdrop. It was originally placed as a temporary memorial at Algiers Point, "a site along the Mississippi River that had served as a holding area for enslaved humans before their sale into bondage," but even at another exhibition on the National Mall, the new location holds many surrounding connections to the institution of slavery.[lxxiv]

Figure 11. Kara Walker, *The Katastwóf Karavan* (2017). Steel frame mounted to lumber running gear, aluminum, red oak, and muslin wall panels, propane fired boiler, water tank, gas generator, brass and steel 38-note steam calliope, calliope controller panel with MIDI interface, iPad controller with QRS PNO software; 152 x 216 x 100 inches, National Gallery of Art. https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/special/kara-walkers-the-katastwof-karavan.html.

The title also holds significant weight in the analysis of this piece. Breaking it down, *katastwóf,* or "catastrophe" as Walker defines for the National Gallery of Art, relates to the catastrophe of slavery. "Karavan" more commonly spelled "caravan," is the "[...] 8000-pound water-jet cut steel Cart" that Walker uses to display her silhouettes. In this "FAQ" page for her installation, she writes that:

> [...] we simply say "Slavery" as if that were a legitimate job instead of what it was, a Catastrophe for millions. Many other cultures in the world have given a name to the catastrophic historical events which traumatized and shaped who they are, often that word translates to "Catastrophe" in English, or katastwóf, in Haitian Creole. Haiti is a country formed by the only successful African Slave revolt in history, so it's legit, I borrowed the creole for richness and style.[lxxv]

It is also important to note that her change from "c" to "k" has two potential meanings. The alliteration of the title is something characteristic of Walker, but it can't help but be noticed that "Karavan" at its core is "Kara" and "van." Regardless of her purpose (although I would argue that she is incredibly intentional), her own name is infused in a title that is meant to encompass a wider meaning involving millions of people. This again goes to show the artist's personal involvement in her work.

The sculptural *Katastwóf Karavan* is displayed on a flat concrete rectangle surrounded by grass, so there technically is no "front" or "back." Viewed in the round, visitors can see all four sides in clear detail, the sharp contrast of the black and white

colors brightened on sunny days. Cycloramas, or immersive circular theaters, were "popular during the post-Civil War era for the depiction of battle scenes."[lxxvi] This term has been used to describe Walker's work both by herself and by scholars such as Michael D. Harris who says that "[i]n some ways, Walker's works are cycloramas narrating a surreal racial battle that continues beneath the surface in the modern South, and within the artist, as the viewer is partially encircled by her larger tableaux."[lxxvii] Through this near-complete encirclement, the viewer is immersed in a fantasy world rooted in deep social and political implications.

The caravan itself also relates back to enslaved people. In Walker's FAQs she describes that:

> [...] thinking about how the Industrial Revolution, the Steam Engine and Cotton 'Gin were pivotal in usurping and grinding up the bodies of laborers and how much of that action, John Henry style, occurs today, with humans fighting uphill battles to prove themselves against the latest technology.[lxxviii]

Each panel of the caravan depicts a different scene. The two longest sides each have multiple figures interacting with one another. One side shows four children or young adults (based upon height) with a baby walking towards the left and all tied together with a rope between their necks. In front of the leading figure, three children sit on top of one another's shoulders, decreasing in size as they get to the top. The smallest child wears a much-too-large hat and holds a whip, pointing at the roped children. Grass, trees and smoke surround them. On the other side, a boy and girl hold a child strung between them, being carried by their hair and ankles. A collar with a bell that loops over the boy's head looks reminiscent of an angler fish's lure. The girl wears boots too big for her feet and holds some sort of stick with a ball attached to the top end. A fourth figure hangs from the trees, almost menacingly, over the suspended child.

The two longest sides have a centered horizontal rhombus cut out that exposes the calliope on the inside of the Karavan. A calliope was a common musical instrument used in the 19th century for carnival steamboats. Walker uses this instrument to play "jazz, gospel, and songs that, in Walker's words, represent both 'Black protest and celebration,'" and evoke the setting surrounding it.[lxxix] Walker invited the Grammy-nominated Jazz musician Jason Moran to play several times on the calliope and by doing so, the static sculpture comes alive. As the National Gallery of Art describes, "[t]he Katastwóf Karavan creates pulses in the human body (in its biological organs), loudly memorializing a once-silent, violent history and its legacy."[lxxx] By becoming a multi-sensory presentation, viewers can have a deeper experience with its vivid imagery and rich historical recontextualization.

Having this piece as a sculpture placed in an outdoor setting by the river a steamboat would have traveled on, Walker's message can be understood not only through what it is depicting but also in context with its physical, historical, and emotional environment. You are not only looking at images of slavery but are standing on the ground where enslaved people lived or surrounded by buildings that held the fate of peoples' lives in their hands. This brings a new experience to Walker's already intense and thoughtful work.

Social media has become yet another way for visitors to interact with Walker's work. For the right or even wrong reasons, her art has ended up in selfies on Instagram, again almost implicating viewers in her scenes, even without their knowing. Apps like Instagram and Twitter have become a way for artists' work to be spread outside of the museum, thus reaching a much wider audience. This recent phenomenon, while promoting more interaction, can sometimes ignore the weight, symbols, and messages of the work. Walker is appropriating and reconstructing old stereotypes of Black people into her own stories, connecting something rooted in the past to what is happening today. Through Walker's satirical yet critical lens, we can be moved, disgusted, horrified, shocked, delighted, and enthralled with every piece she creates.

A Rediscovery of Black Portraiture

During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and with many museums closed to the public, the Getty Museum challenged Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter users to re-create their favorite works of art by only using items they already had at home.[lxxxi] Something that started as a way to get people active and creative during a time in which we were all confined to our houses quickly became a viral sensation. People all over the globe began participating in the #GettyMuseumChallege, including Peter Brathwaite who lives in England.

Brathwaite is best known for his "versatile, charismatic, and intelligent performances" as a baritone opera singer.[lxxxii] But after seeing the Getty Museum's challenge on Twitter, he decided to participate by starting his own hashtag series: #RediscoveringBlackPortraiture. Upon looking at recreations done by others, he realized that there was a lack of Black representation in the "so-called great artworks we choose to platform and celebrate."[lxxxiii] He narrates in his book how as a performer, he has had to navigate "otherness in relation to myself and the canon of Western classical music that I love and love to perform."[lxxxiv] Inspired by his interest in representation in people who "look like [him] in the classical canon," Brathwaite began recreating depictions of Black figures in art spanning back centuries.[lxxxv] A little over half of his full collection of 93 tweet recreations was then compiled into his book *Rediscovering Black Portraiture* in early 2023.[lxxxvi] In these images, Brathwaite takes on the role of the figure, just like he would in his performance.

The Paston Treasure

One of these additions includes a reinterpretation of *The Paston Treasure* (Fig. 12) originally painted by an unknown Dutch artist in the early 1670s. This work showcases a real record of all of the treasures in a British father-son collection.[lxxxvii] Musical instruments, flowers, fruit, a globe, and more clutter tables and stools. A column and large red curtain, which alludes to the Baroque convention, dominates the background and two figures are seated around the table—a young man to the left and a small child seated between the two tables. Senior Curator Francessca Vanke writes that the combination of items like an extinguished candle or clock along with the valuable gold pieces seems to mock the idea of wealth. Life's fleetingness is a common theme in

seventeenth-century Dutch still life paintings and reminds us that even things of luxury will pass eventually—everything comes to an end.[lxxxviii]

Figure 12. Peter Braithwaite, *Untitled* (Reinterpretation of *The Paston Treasure*) (2020). (Twitter Caption) Anonymous: The Paston Treasure (c.1665). Reworked with - Afro hair products, Côte d'Ivoire prints, granny's patchwork, Jessye Norman, Leontyne Price and family luggage from their arrival in the UK. Rediscovering #blackportraiture through #gettymuseumchallenge. #gettychallenge. https://twitter.com/PeterBrathwaite/status/1252885388445642754?t=NsTZkdkA-jshho4_fqe09w&s=19

Vanke asserts that the girl was most likely the daughter of Robert Patson, the son of William Patson whose collection is depicted in the painting. The young Black man on the left was possibly purchased by William and wears clothes that reflect the wealth surrounding him. "There is no evidence of enslaved servants at Oxnead Hall, Norfolk (the Paston family seat from 1420 and 1732), but, true to contemporary classist and racist norms, their presence may be unrecorded," Vanke goes on to write.[lxxxix] Brathwaite also describes the figure in *Rediscovering Black Portraiture*:

> His flesh tones are finely rendered, but is he even really there? His presence is all that visually links this display of wealth to the brutal conditions of chattel slavery. His depiction, to me, represents a process of being dehumanized twice over—first as a piece of property, and then again because this scene is so far removed from his actual reality. My re-creation asks what it means to take up space as a Black man.[xc]

Brathwaite reimagines this collection with his own household items including, but not limited to, a British flag, a stuffed monkey, his grandmother's quilt, luggage, hair products, food, musical instruments, vinyls, and even a small Jeff Koons balloon dog. In *The Paston Treasure,* the black figure on the left could be interpreted as an "object" in the collection and so by replacing the original figure with his own body, he reimagines himself as the potentially enslaved "possession." While the objects in the painting relate to an imagined affluent white aristocrat, Brathwhite's are incredibly personal, not a

replica of what is originally depicted. As his Twitter caption states, they consist of “Afro hair products, Côte d'Ivoire prints, granny’s patchwork, Jessye Norman, Leontyne Price and family luggage from their arrival in the UK.”[xci] These are not random items, but instead his version of the Dutch opulent treasures, specially curated to represent who Brathwaite is and where he comes from. Included in Act I of his book, he categorizes this image as one where the subject is seen as marginal and an accessory.[xcii] By inserting himself into a rendition of this work, he inverts the relationship between the Black figure in the painting and his own fictionalized composition.

Olympia

Moving forward in time, Brathwaite not only pulls from the full-size original drawings or paintings, but specifically draws out the Black figures like he does with Manet’s *Olympia* (Fig. 13). He zooms in on Laure, the figure behind Olympia, in order to put the spotlight on someone who has historically been left out of conversations surrounding this painting or only talked about in terms of her blackness compared to Olympia’s whiteness.[xciii] Denise Murrel in *Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today* writes that there has been:

> […] an ideological ‘blindness’ in art history [that] justifies giving only nominal attention to the black maid because, as a servant, she is perceived to be in an immutable and natural role, and therefore expected, unworthy of notice […][xciv]

Through this “detail” of Laure, she becomes worthy of our notice. Her existence becomes unavoidable.

Figure 13. Peter Brathwaite, *Untitled* (Reinterpretation of *Olympia*) (2021). (Twitter caption) Édouard Manet: (Detail) Olympia (1865). Putting the spotlight on Laure - the black model known for her work with Manet. Reworked with lilies, roses and a selection of family history documents. Rediscovering #blackportraiture through #gettymuseumchallenge.

https://twitter.com/PeterBrathwaite/status/1365205874323709953?t=JHxC6C9BypB6Heb38tRtRA&s=19

Laure wears a European loose pink and white dress that covers her whole body compared to the cultural images of Black women at the time, usually with their breasts exposed.[xcv] A headscarf is tied on the back of her head, and she holds a large bouquet of flowers wrapped in paper.[xcvi] Brathwaite writes that her "presence alludes to the changing population of modern Paris. Laure is not exoticized in the same way as many other Black sitters in the European canon."[xcvii] He asserts that this signals a higher status than a typical maid, which makes Manet's portrayal "daring" as it includes "so many aspects of modern city life" in his work.[xcviii] In his photograph, Braithwaite wears similar clothing and poses in the same manner—right hand holding open the bouquet while gazing off to the left. He eliminates the legs of the reclined Olympia from Manet's work, which halts connections and implications between the racial portrayals of Olympia and Laure from the original work. Inserting himself even more into the rendition, Brathwaite replaces the paper surrounding the bouquet of flowers with "a selection of family history documents."[xcix] Although Brathwaite keeps his cropped beard and mustache, he addes a small line of eyeliner, potentially to create a more feminine look that would relate to Laure.

Emphasizing a portrait of a Black figure, who historically has been unresearched until just recently, reinforces Brathwaite's message about "rediscovering" Black portraiture. Just like how feminist discourse surrounding *Olympia* called attention the invisibility of the "class conditions of prostitution," the artist calls attention the invisibility of Laure.[c] He highlights the model by placing himself in her shoes but makes it a more intimate recreation by incorporating objects that relate to himself and his family. This firmly asserts him both back in Laure's time and in his contemporary world.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self

While Brathwaite's reinterpretations predominantly draw from classic works of art, he also creates dialogue with his contemporaries, including Kerry James Marshall. His reinterpretation of Marshall's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self* at first glance appears to be created with just construction paper (Fig. 14). Like Marshall's face, his is solid black with gleaming white eyes and the same missing tooth in the front. Looking closer at the edge of the chin and beginning of the neck, the colors change from solid black to a snippet of warmer brown—most likely Brathwaite's real skin. Making this image more personally identifiable in a way that Marshall's is not, Brathwaite adds a "purpose pin badge" from the National Museum of African American History & Culture to his right lapel.[ci]

Figure 14. Peter Brathwaite, *Untitled* (Reinterpretation of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self*) (2020).
(Twitter Caption) Kerry James Marshall: A Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of His Former Self (1980). Marshall's "self-portrait" investigating the colour black. Reworked with #purpose pin badge from @NMAAHC. Rediscovering #blackportraiture through #gettymuseumchallenge. #gettychallenge
https://twitter.com/PeterBrathwaite/status/1271329789673005056/photo/1

What we begin to realize is that this is a 2D reconstruction used as a mask in a photographic portrait of Brathwaite's upper body. With this mask hiding his face, a white shirt and black sweater or jacket peak out underneath just like in the original work. This form of "masking" has a personally significant meaning to Brathwaite who writes that:

> For me, as a second-generation Barbadian, re-creating this work offered an opportunity to recognize the irrespressible masking traditions of the African Caribbean. Through the subversive act of masquerade, my ancestors drew strength from performing their way through enlsavement, emancipation, and beyond. Holding on to such traditions allowed—and still allows—them to remain visible, to be seen.[cii]

In the caption, Brathwaite expands on his original post by quoting a New York Times article that brings us back to Marshall's relationship with Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.[ciii] Exactly 40 years later, Brathwaite equates himself to Marshall's "self-portrait," posing them side-by-side to an extent that is hard to tell them apart unless you are familiar with the original. This not only links both artists, but unites ideas surrounding identity, invisibility and representation. By recreating the works of artists like Marshall and Kehinde Wiley, Brathwaite traces themes of invisibility from the past to the present while also emphasizing the still-existing need for representation that his contemporaries are still pushing for.

The artist's attention to detail, intentionality and sheer number of photographs has placed himself firmly in this dialogue of what visual representation looks like and why it is important still today. Alongside this, Brathwaite too—just like Marshall and Walker—intimately connects himself to the work. Whether that be through specific artifacts from his life or portraits that he resonates with, he views his body of art as a "family tree" and through these recreations, reclaims his ancestry that was stolen from him.[civ] Brathwaite describes in *Rediscovery Black Portraiture*:

> By recreating as many Black figures as possible, using the stuff in my house and the camera of my iPhone 7, I would commit to rescuing their [Black figures] voices from oblivion—and in doing so, challenge how art history has been told.[cv]

Careful research, curation, and posing allow him to explore what his enslaved ancestors "submerged lives" by using his mind as a "rehabilitative tool."[cvi]

#RediscoveringBlackPortraiture offers us the perspective of someone who did not necessarily define themselves as a visual artist before entering this viral challenge. Through social media, Brathwaite was able to contribute a remarkable body of work to the art world already in an increasingly digitizing age. His work responds to Black visibility through a medium that Marshall and Walker had not intentionally penetrated. This allows for a connection between the artist and the viewer that wouldn't normally happen. With art being traditionally shown in galleries or museums, social media offers a platform for art to be consumed by anyone and everyone, regardless of their access to such spaces. It also allows for a dispersion of ideas, where thoughts and critiques are shared at the click of a button. By using this platform, knowingly or unknowingly, Brathwaite contributes to breaking a barrier between the art world and viewers. His aim is not to create an entirely new art history, but rather to "[enrich] the artistic canon we already know."[cvii]

Conclusion

What these three artists have shown us is that while there is indeed a "post-Black" need to move away from the rigidity and restrictions that come with labels, artists are still calling to evaluate and reinvent Black visibility in art. There is still a need for dialogue surrounding representation; a need to deconstruct history to better understand our present; a need for personal connection and seeing oneself in art. These ideas do not negate one another, in fact I think they complement each other. We will never be in a world where we can separate identity from art, but we can and should move past a monolithic idea of "Black art" to something more all-encompassing. Their ideas reflect a movement for critique rather than elimination of the past. Professor Derek Conrad Murray asserts that:

> The rearticulation of African American identity emergent in contemporary art suggests that existing notions of blackness have underrepresented—or completely failed to represent—constituencies within the community whose experiences are not encapsulated by civil rights and Black Power–era value systems.[cviii]

Through this lens, they pose their work as an examination of historical representation without negating it all together. Marshall recalls canonical works and reinvents their composition to reflect contemporary Black American experiences. Walker inverts antebellum mediums and depictions of Black people to confront our ideas of race. Brathwaite gives voices to Black figures from the past who did not have agency in their own depictions. All three of these artists resonate with and to some extent reflect their work. They show how art can operate as something symbolic to their own lives while also speaking on larger issues their viewers can relate to.

Kerry James Marshall, Kara Walker, and Peter Brathwaite each explore a clever and unique way of looking into historical representations of Black people to understand their present experiences as artists. Whether that is through inventing a new color for Black, commenting on traditional caricatures of Black people, or reinserting oneself into famous works of art, each artist presents a new and deeply personal way of approaching their artwork. Although not all-encompassing of the contemporary Black experience, these three perspectives allow us to invest in conversations about how Black people have been seen or not seen in art and how dialogue and representation have changed throughout the past few decades. Artists do not think or make art in monolithic terms. However, it is important to research, uplift, and discover new ways artists explore their identities to contextualize their current experiences.

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[i] Jessie L. Whitehead, "Invisibility of Blackness: Visual Responses of Kerry James Marshall," *Art Education* 62, no. 2 (March 2009): 33–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2009.11519010.

[ii] Tom W. Smith, "Changing Racial Labels: From 'Colored' to 'Negro' to 'Black' to 'African American,'" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (1992): 496, https://doi.org/10.1086/269339.

[iii] There is much discourse around whether to use "black," "Black," "African American," "BIPOC" or "person/people of color" to refer to those of African descent, although these terms have become more widely applied to darker skin tones in general. As Touré writes in his book *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?*, "I have chosen to capitalize the word 'Black' and lowercase 'white' throughout this book. I believe 'Black' constitutes a group, an ethnicity equivalent to African-American, Negro, or, in terms of a sense of ethnic cohesion, Irish, Polish, or Chinese. I don't believe that whiteness merits the same treatment. Most American whites think of themselves as Italian-American or Jewish or otherwise relating to other past connections that Blacks cannot make because of the familial and national disruptions of slavery. So to me, because Black speaks to an unknown familial/national past it deserves capitalization." Based on Touré's words as well as my own understanding, I have chosen to capitalize "Black" for this paper. For more readings on this I would like to refer the reader to John Eligon's article "A Debate Over Identity and Race Asks, Are African-Americans 'Black' or 'black'?" and Lori L. Tharps' article "The Case for Black With a Capital B" in *The New York Times*.

[iv] I was not able to clarify his DOB. This date is loosely based on an article by The Guardian that claims he was 38 when interviewed; see: (https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/dec/16/peter-brathwaite-im-taking-it-into-my-own-hands-to-tell-stories-of-our-shared-history).

[v] I would like to note my limitations as a white woman writing about Black artists. I by no means want to homogenize Black culture or Black artists, and I recognize that no amount of research makes me an expert on what it means to be Black. However, I have read and learned a lot in hopes of better understanding these artists and their individual experiences and how they connect to the world around them. I hope that this comes across in the way that I write about them, and I am always open and willing for feedback.

[vi] For the sake of continuity, I capitalize the “Black” in “post-Black,” although for quotations I will reflect the author’s choice.
[vii] Cathy Bird, “Is There a ‘Post-Black’ Art? Investigating the Legacy of the ‘Freestyle’ Show,” *Art Papers*, 2002.
[viii] Nana Adusei-Poku, “Post-Post-Black,” in Taking Stakes in the Unknown: Tracing Post-Black Art (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2021), 183–92.
[ix] There are several counterpoints to Golden’s definition including one from Nana Adusei-Poku’s article “Post-Post-Black” where she writes that, “Four years after the term post-black entered the discourse, performance theorist and artist Malik Gaines remarked in the catalogue to *Frequency* that the term was ambiguously perceived, either as a disrespectful dismissal of the political achievements of the civil rights movement or as a marketing strategy for a newly appointed curator,” (185).
[x] Quoted here is Thelma Golden, but pulled from Cathy Bird, “Is There a ‘Post-Black’ Art? Investigating the Legacy of the ‘Freestyle’ Show,” *Art Papers*, 2002.
[xi] Cameron Leader-Picone, “On the Blackness of Post-Blackness: Colson Whitehead and Racial Individualism,” essay, in *Black and More than Black: African American Fiction in the Post Era* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2019), 33–60.
[xii] Calvin Reid and Kerry James Marshall. “Kerry James Marshall.” *BOMB*, 1998, 41.
[xiii] Reid and James Marshall. “Kerry James Marshall,” 41.
[xiv] Seattle Art Museum, “Figuring History - ‘School of Beauty, School of Culture,’ Kerry James Marshall,” YouTube, April 26, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=ad7Wg9zk0Es.
[xv] Dieter Roelstraete, “Visible Man,” essay, in *Kerry James Marshall - Mastry* (Chicago, IL: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2016), 47.
[xvi] Ibid. 47.
[xvii] Ibid.
[xviii] Kerry James Marshall, “Notes on Career and Work,” essay, in *Kerry James Marshall* (NY, NY: Henry N. Abrams Inc., 2000), 117.
[xix] Roelstraete, “Visible Man,” 48.
[xx] Marshall, “Notes on Career and Work,” 117.
[xxi] Ibid.
[xxii] Whitehead, “Invisibility of Blackness: Visual Responses of Kerry James Marshall,” 33.
[xxiii] Ibid.
[xxiv] John P. Pittman, “Double Consciousness,” Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, February16, 2023, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/double-consciousness/.
[xxv] Roelstraete, “Visible Man,” 47.
[xxvi] From my findings, I do not see this correlation, but I am not positive on the cover edition that Roelstraete is referring to.
[xxvii] Terrie Sultan, “This Is the Way We Live,” essay, in *Kerry James Marshall* (Ny, NY: Henry N. Abrams Inc., 2000) 22.
[xxviii] Terrie Sultan, “This Is the Way We Live,” essay, in *Kerry James Marshall* (Ny, NY: Henry N. Abrams Inc., 2000) 22.
[xxix] “Many Mansions,” The Art Institute of Chicago, https://www.artic.edu/artworks/137125/many-mansions.
[xxx] The capitalization of the phrases is to best represent how they are painted in the work. All quoted phrases were deciphered by my own examination of the work.
[xxxi] This text is a play on the Bible verse John 14:2, “In my Father’s house there are many mansions.”
[xxxii] These flowers pop up over and over in Marshall’s work in pieces like *Better Homes Better Gardens* (1994) and *Untitled (Altgeld Gardens)* (1995).
[xxxiii] Sultan, “This Is the Way We Live,” 18.
[xxxiv] Reid and Marshall. “Kerry James Marshall,” 45.
[xxxv] Ibid.
[xxxvi] Sultan asserts that while he uses the conventions of a foreground, middleground, and background, “[h]e then violates this perspectival space by decorating it” with the abstracted flowers; see: Terrie Sultan, “This Is the Way We Live,” essay, in *Kerry James Marshall* (Ny, NY: Henry N. Abrams Inc., 2000), 18.
[xxxvii] Seattle Art Museum asserts that this is Marshall’s camera flash in the mirror and based on my analysis of the work, I would agree that it makes sense for Marshall to include himself.

[xxxviii] Special thank you to my Senior Thesis classmate Annie Schofield for identifying "seduction."
[xxxix] For reference, each period separates a section of words in each poster. Readability is up to the viewer. I've also capitalized what Marshall capitalizes in the posters to be as accurate as possible. Periods are used to signal how I separated phrases.
[xl]Although this has not been confirmed by scholars I read (part of the words are covered up), when searching "Lauren Hill signature," "One Love!" comes up in the same handwriting often.
[xli] I would like to thank Jaime Schwartz, a friend of Marshall's, for helping me identify Cheryl.
[xlii] Tracey Owens Patton, "Hey Girl, Am I More than My Hair?: African American Women and Their Struggles with Beauty, Body Image, and Hair," *NWSA Journal* 18, no. 2 (2006), 24.
[xliii] The Seattle Art Museum cites the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities Leagues in saying that "the three Pan-African colors on the flag represent: red: the blood that unites all people of Black African ancestry, and shed for liberation; black: black people whose existence as a nation, though not a nation-state, is affirmed by the existence of the flag; and green: the abundant natural wealth of Africa." "School of Beauty, School of Culture," Figuring History, March 15, 2023, https://figuringhistory.site.seattleartmuseum.org/kerry-james-marshall/school-beauty-school-culture/.
[xliv] "Black Power." National Archives and Records Administration, March 16, 2021. https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/black-power.
[xlv] Marshall's 1993 *Beauty Examined* not only has the similar composition of Rembrandt's work, but also explores themes surrounding what beauty is "supposed" to look like.
[xlvi] Katherine Ladd, "May 2013: School of Beauty, School of Culture: Birmingham Museum of Art," Birmingham Museum of Art, April 25, 2013, https://www.artsbma.org/may-2013-spotlight/.
[xlvii] Ibid.
[xlviii] Marie Porterfield, "Lesson 12: Hans Holbein and Kerry James Marshall," Art Appreciation Open Educational Resource, 2020, https://dc.etsu.edu/art-appreciation-oer/13.
[xlix] Chrisél Attewell, *Kara Walker - Interesting Facts About Artist Kara Walker*, Art in Context, November 6, 2022, https://artincontext.org/kara-walker/.
[l] Walker Art Center, "Kara Walker."
[li] Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 210.
[lii] "Introduction: Kara Walker-No/Yes/?," Howardena Pindell, https://pindell.mcachicago.org/the-howardena-pindell-papers/introduction-kara-walker-no-yes/.
[liii] Kara Walker, "Biography," Kara Walker, 2024, https://www.karawalkerstudio.com/biography.
[liv] Matthea Harvey and Kara Walker, Kara Walker, *BOMB*, Summer 2007, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40427888.
[lv] Dan Cameron, "Kara Walker: Rubbing History the Wrong Way," *On Paper* 2, no. 1 (1997), 11.
[lvi] "Kara Walker's The Katastwóf Karavan," National Gallery of Art, 2022, https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/special/kara-walkers-the-katastwof-karavan.html.
[lvii] Cameron, "Kara Walker: Rubbing History the Wrong Way," 11.
[lviii] Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*, 191-192.
[lix] Dan Cameron, "Kara Walker: Rubbing History the Wrong Way," *On Paper* 2, no. 1 (1997): 10–14, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24554660.
[lx] Vivien Green Fryd, "Kara Walker's about the Title: The Ghostly Presence of Transgenerational Trauma as a 'Connective Tissue' between the Past and Present," Panorama, November 8, 2022, https://journalpanorama.org/article/kara-walkers-about-the-title-the-ghostly-presence-of-transgenerational-trauma-as-a-connective-tissue-between-the-past-and-present/#markerref-2913-22.
[lxi] "Look Away! Look Away! Look Away!," *BOMB* Magazine.
[lxii] "Look Away! Look Away! Look Away!," *BOMB* Magazine.
[lxiii] Dinah Holtzman, dissertation, *Portrait of the Postmodern Artist as Hysteric* (University of Rochester, 2011), 245.
[lxiv] "Blackface: The Birth of an American Stereotype," National Museum of African American History and Culture, November 22, 2017, https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/blackface-birth-american-stereotype.
[lxv] Holtzman, *Portrait of the Postmodern Artist as Hysteric*, 246.
[lxvi] Ibid.
[lxvii] Ibid. 247
[lxviii] Ibid.

[lxix] "Blackface: The Birth of an American Stereotype," National Museum of African American History and Culture.
[lxx] Ibid.
[lxxi] To learn more about racial stereotypes see: https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/popular-and-pervasive-stereotypes-african-americans.
[lxxii] To look more into contemporary blackface, the University of Pittsburg has compiled a list of news articles relating to its use; see: https://pitt.libguides.com/c.php?g=935570&p=6831077
[lxxiii] Created in 2018, then exhibited by the Whitney in 2019 and the National Gallery of Art in 2022.
[lxxiv] "Kara Walker's The Katastwóf Karavan," National Gallery of Art.
[lxxv] Kara Walker, "About Kara Walker's the Katastwóf Karavan," FAQs: The Katastwóf Karavan, 2018, https://www.nga.gov/features/the-katastwof-karavan.html.
[lxxvi] Walker Art Center, "Kara Walker."
[lxxvii] Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*, 215.
[lxxviii] "Kara Walker's The Katastwóf Karavan," National Gallery of Art.
[lxxix] Quote pulled from the caption in a YouTube video of Jason Moran playing at the Whitney Exhibition. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_b6S-c6pVI to listen to a snippet of the performance.
[lxxx] "Kara Walker's The Katastwóf Karavan," National Gallery of Art.
[lxxxi] Sarah Waldorf, "Getty Artworks Re-Created with Household Items by Geniuses the World Over," Getty, March 30, 2020, https://www.getty.edu/news/getty-artworks-recreated-with-household-items-by-creative-geniuses-the-world-over/.
[lxxxii] Peter Brathwaite, 2024, https://www.peterbrathwaitebaritone.com/.
[lxxxiii] Peter Brathwaite et al., Rediscovering Black Portraiture (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 2023), 9.
[lxxxiv] Ibid.
[lxxxv] Ibid.
[lxxxvi] I calculated the number of his full collection based on the photographs from his website; see: https://www.peterbrathwaitebaritone.com/work/rediscoveringblackportraiture
[lxxxvii] Norfolk Museums, "The Paston Treasure," The Paston Treasure - Norfolk Museums, accessed April 8, 2024, https://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk/collections/features/the-paston-treasure.
[lxxxviii] Francesca Vanke, "A Closer Look At 'The Paston Treasure,'" Art UK, January 16, 2023, https://artuk.org/discover/stories/a-closer-look-at-the-paston-treasure.
[lxxxix] I found this troubling since there was also a figure of a white child amidst the objects, although through a Feminist lens, she might be perceived as an object as a woman to her father and later husband.
[xc] Brathwaite et al., Rediscovering Black Portraiture, 49.
[xci] Peter Brathwaite, Twitter, April 22, 2020, https://twitter.com/PeterBrathwaite/status/1252885388445642754?t=NsTZkdkA-jshho4_fqe09w&s=19
[xcii] Brathwaite et al., Rediscovering Black Portraiture, 12.
[xciii] Denise Murrell, Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet to Matisse to Today (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 55.
[xciv] Murrell, *Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet to Matisse to Today*, 3.
[xcv] Ibid. 55.
[xcvi] Full comments from this post (see Fig. 13 for the link) compiled into one text with original punctuation and errors kept in order to preserve the integrity of the artist: 2 of 5. Laure has been described as African or Caribbean, her last name is not yet known. "Laure's appearance as a servant in this scene is more about alluding to modern Paris's changing population, and is less about her being 'exotic'." (from Pallant) [Includes the full original image here] 3 of 5. "Some have argued that the black servant in a clean white dress, clearly more than a common maid, further fueled the painting's controversy." Art historian Griselda Polluck suggests that Laure met Manet while working as a nursemaid in the Tuileries Garden in Paris. 4 of 5. Manet's notebook, included in the 2019 exhibition 'Le Modéle noir, de Géricault á Mattisse' at the @MuseeOrsay, recorded her address at 11, rue de Vintimille in Paris. (Wiki) An earlier portrait of Laure: Éduoard Manet, "La négresse (Portrait of Laure)," 1863 [See Figure __ for reference to the picture he inserted here] 5 of 5. Check out the full Rediscovering #blackportraiture gallery: peterbrathwaitebaritone.com.
[xcvii] Brathwaite et al., *Rediscovering Black Portraiture*,129.

[xcviii] Ibid.
[xcix] Brathwaite doesn't elaborate on the documents but a few headlines can be made out including "St. Phillip" and "Descendants of James Kennedy"; see: https://twitter.com/PeterBrathwaite/status/1365205874323709953?t=JHxC6C9BypB6Heb38tRtRA&s=19.
[c] Murrell, *Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet to Matisse to Today*, XVI.
[ci] Although this is cannot be identified in the photo, Brathwaite names it in the caption.
[cii] Brathwaite et al., *Rediscovering Black Portraiture*, 141.
[ciii] Full comments from this post (see Fig. 14 for the link) compiled into one text with original punctuation and errors kept in order to preserve the integrity of the artist: "You may think, with a twinge of unease, of cartoons, or of old racist stereotypes, or of race as performance: blackamoors, Sambos, Madea. What Mr. Marshall was thinking of was Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel "Invisible Man," whose African-American hero knows that his color makes him unseeable as a person in white America: He's a black; that's it. Mr. Marshall complicates this idea by taking it in two directions: His "self-portrait" is simultaneously recessive and unmissable, with his eyes and his assertive, mock-cheerful, near skeletal smile that shine like pin spots in the dark. Black skin is a constant in Mr. Marshall's art. More than three decades ago, he resolved to devote himself to creating a new, disruptive art history, one that would insert — big-time — the absent black figure into the tradition of Western art, which was a tradition he loved and identified with. " (Info from NY Times). Follow the link and click on >view in room< to see the true size: https://www.artsy.net/artwork/kerry-james-marshall-a-portrait-of-the-artist-as-a-shadow-of-his-former-self.
[civ] Brathwaite et al., *Rediscovering Black Portraiture*, 11.
[cv] Ibid. 10.
[cvi] Ibid. 11.
[cvii] Ibid. 12.
[cviii] Derek Conrad Murray, "Mickalene Thomas: Afro-Kitsch and the Queering of Blackness," American Art 28, no. 1 (March 2014): 9–15, https://doi.org/10.1086/676624, 9.