



Four Points of View

Alumni Making Art



Four Points of View: Alumni Making Art

Shameika Black '11
Harold Buchanan '69
Leandre Jackson '75
May Thomas '76

June 2020
Presented by the Black Cultural Center
and List Gallery, Swarthmore College

Introduction

by Dion Lewis, associate dean and director of the Black Cultural Center

This catalog celebrates the art of four alumni – Harold Buchanan '69, Leandre Jackson '75, May Thomas '76, and Shameika Black '11 – who have contributed to the vitality of the Black Cultural Center (BCC) at Swarthmore College. As we complete a year-long series of events celebrating the 50th anniversary of the BCC, we not only honor this storied institution, but also recognize the way art enables us to interpret history, transform culture, and strengthen community.

When I began directing the BCC in December 2014, one of the first artworks I encountered was an image of students posing on the front porch on a beautiful spring day. This photograph was part of the *Black Liberation 1969* exhibition installed at McCabe Library in conjunction with Professor Allison Dorsey's course *Black Liberation in 1969: Black Studies in History, Theory, and Praxis*. The course was designed to interrogate Black student activism at Swarthmore College in the 1960s. The image was created by Leandre Jackson, who served as the BCC's first director after graduating in 1975. This wonderful photograph, shown below, captures a close-knit community of relaxed and confident students. They appear self-possessed, interconnected, and at home. The image hangs at the entrance to the BCC, where it welcomes everyone and reminds us that many people united to develop this resource. Each spring for the last five years, I have invited students to create an updated version of this image. We assemble on the front porch, reflecting on the past, savoring the present, and looking to our united future.



Leandre Jackson, 1971

Such images remind us that representations matter: they can obscure or reveal, deflate or inspire. Throughout my career in higher education, my appreciation for art has consistently grown, providing a way to build community and advocate for social justice. So, in May 2019, as I was planning a year-long series of events to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the BCC, I naturally thought that an art exhibition would appropriately honor this organization's history and continuing relevance. I proposed this idea to List Gallery Director Andrea Packard, and she immediately agreed to organize an exhibition of works by Black alumni in the List Gallery from

late-May to mid-June 2020. I selected the four artists, and Syd Carpenter curated their images; her essay on the following pages provides insight into their works. Of course, we did not anticipate that a pandemic would interrupt our plans, but when the College closed its campus to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, we agreed that this publication would serve in its place, as a virtual exhibition.

The BCC would not have come into being without the passion and activism of individuals such as Harold Buchanan '69. I met Harold in early 2015, shortly after I began working at Swarthmore. As a student activist, he advocated for Black students, paving the way for the establishment of the BCC. In 1969, he was one of a group of students who conducted a peaceful protest, taking over the Admissions office in order to bring issues in Black culture to the forefront and highlight the unique challenges confronting Black students. The recent book, *Seven Sisters and a Brother*, describes his involvement in that event. He was a founding member of the Swarthmore Black Alumni Network (SBAN), and continues to strengthen the Black community at Swarthmore.

Leandre Jackson '75, a prolific photographer for more than 50 years, has played a key role in the BCC. After his first year as a student, he became an active supporter of the Swarthmore African-American Student Society (SASS). He strongly believed that Black students needed to develop a legacy that would last beyond their physical presence on campus and put his beliefs into action as the BCC's first director. Over the years, he has mounted exhibitions of his photographs at the BCC and elsewhere, including a recent exhibition at Swarthmore's McCabe Library.

Another participant in this project, May Thomas '76, describes the BCC as a home base and sanctuary, not only as a student, but also as an alumna. While pursuing a biology major at Swarthmore, she worked in the library, studied, and socialized at the BCC. She was an active member of SASS and served on the committee that hired Janet Dickerson, the first Black dean at Swarthmore. Subsequently, she became a member of SBAN. After graduating from Swarthmore, May developed her artistic practice while also pursuing a career in medicine and working on the frontlines during the AIDS epidemic. She views her paintings as a form of interconnection.

Similarly, Shameika Black '11 did not study art at Swarthmore – she pursued a special major in Africana Studies – and the BCC was integral to her education here. She was a BCC intern all four years, organizing events, installing the curtains in the living room, and completing countless projects, large and small. After she graduated, she became a member of the SBAN, and served on the SBAN Advisory Committee before a more formal board structure was adopted.

This publication provides the capstone for our year-long celebration of the BCC's 50th anniversary, and I applaud Swarthmore College for its continuing support of the center. Together with the Black Studies Program and other initiatives that strengthen our diverse community, the BCC provides physical space, a sense of sanctuary, and intellectual resources for students who identify as Black. The BCC empowers us to pursue important conversations about the experience of being Black in America and the role that visual representations play in shaping our experience.

I am grateful to Andrea Packard '85 for overseeing this project, conducting research, and editing this publication; Syd Carpenter, for her curatorial essay and expertise; Tess Wei '17 for her design; and the four participating artists. Despite busy schedules and a global pandemic, we have come together, not only to reflect on past accomplishments, but also to celebrate ongoing creativity and new ways of thinking.

Four Points of View: Alumni Making Art

by Syd Carpenter, exhibition curator and professor of art, Swarthmore College

The List Gallery of Swarthmore College presents *Four Points of View: Alumni Making Art*. This virtual exhibition features the work of three photographers and a painter: Shameika Black '11, Harold Buchanan '69, Leandre Jackson '75, and May Thomas '76.

Shameika Black is a self-taught photographer who graduated in 2011 with a B.A. in Africana Studies with a focus on Black literature. *Four Points of View* is her first exhibition. Shameika's images are resonant, thoughtful, and timeless observations of mundane locations. Her photographs of churches and skyscrapers convey a sense of grandeur, while her landscapes describe solitude and sanctuary. She uses color, texture, and pattern to great effect in all of her images. She says of her work, "Filled with profound beauty, connection, and purpose, it is the regularity of our own lives that provides true meaning. Playing with natural light and texture, and by employing the practice of stillness, I want to push viewers to seek out the extraordinary in the commonplace – being still – and appreciating the value in each moment we are gifted to experience."

Harold Buchanan has been making photographs for over 50 years. During those years, Harold has focused his lens across the globe to create images of the world's wildlife. There is an elegant virtuosity to his images that is riveting. Whether he is capturing the poised stance of a bird perched on a branch or making eye contact with a semi-submerged alligator, Harold's photographs record a fleeting intimacy between himself and his subject. His images embody that unspoken impulse to reconnect with our own nature-based origins. He says of his work, "A lover of nature since childhood, I use my photography to capture intimate moments in nature. When I travel, I look for ways to capture the natural beauty of my destinations. I focus mostly on animals, and especially birds, but I am also attracted to a beautiful landscape and the details of a closeup flower."

May Thomas majored in biology at Swarthmore with a concentration in Black Studies. She took her first painting class as an elective. This, too, is May's first exhibition. Her current abstract paintings reflect her ability to look closely and in detail to discover patterns and textures in the natural world. Her love of paint is evident in her lush and tactile brush strokes producing atmospheric surfaces evocative of moving air. Their intimate scale suggests a precious but ephemeral relationship between the artist, her materials, and the viewer's gaze. Her mentor and teacher, Luana Luconi Winner, says her paintings reflect her inner Georgia O'Keefe, the 20th century painter of iconic Southwestern landscapes and evocative floral imagery. May is now a retired physician with plans to resume her formal training in painting and drawing.

Leandre Jackson received a B.A. from Swarthmore in 1975, serving as director of the Black Cultural Center immediately after graduation. In 2015, he exhibited his series, *Proof of Black Life*, in McCabe Library. Professor Dorsey said of the exhibition, "Jackson's photographs stand as evidence of the rich community life Black students created for themselves. These images capture Black students engaged in the academic, social, and sport life of the College. The photographs also reveal intimate moments of connection among Black students as they studied together, ate together, created dance and music together."

Leandre has sustained his art as a professional photographer, creating iconic portraits of both the famous and the anonymous. The photographs selected for this catalog demonstrate his ability to evoke the inner spirituality of his subjects, their empathy, their awareness. His images are indeed alive with color and cinematic lighting. No details can be overlooked as you scan each meticulously composed image.

As curator, it is my pleasure to unite these four alumni artists in a virtual exhibition documenting the inventiveness and persistence of the artists in the Swarthmore community. I also wish to express my gratitude to Dion Lewis, associate dean and director of the Black Cultural Center; Andrea Packard '85, director of the List Gallery; and Tess Wei '17, List Gallery assistant, for their support, creativity, and guidance in making this exhibition possible.

Professor of Art Syd Carpenter teaches in the Black Studies Program and the Department of Art and Art History at Swarthmore College. Recipient of numerous awards, including a Pew Fellowship in the Arts, her ceramic sculptures have been collected by distinguished institutions, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institute; Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute, Jingdezhen China; and The Tang Teaching Museum, Skidmore College.



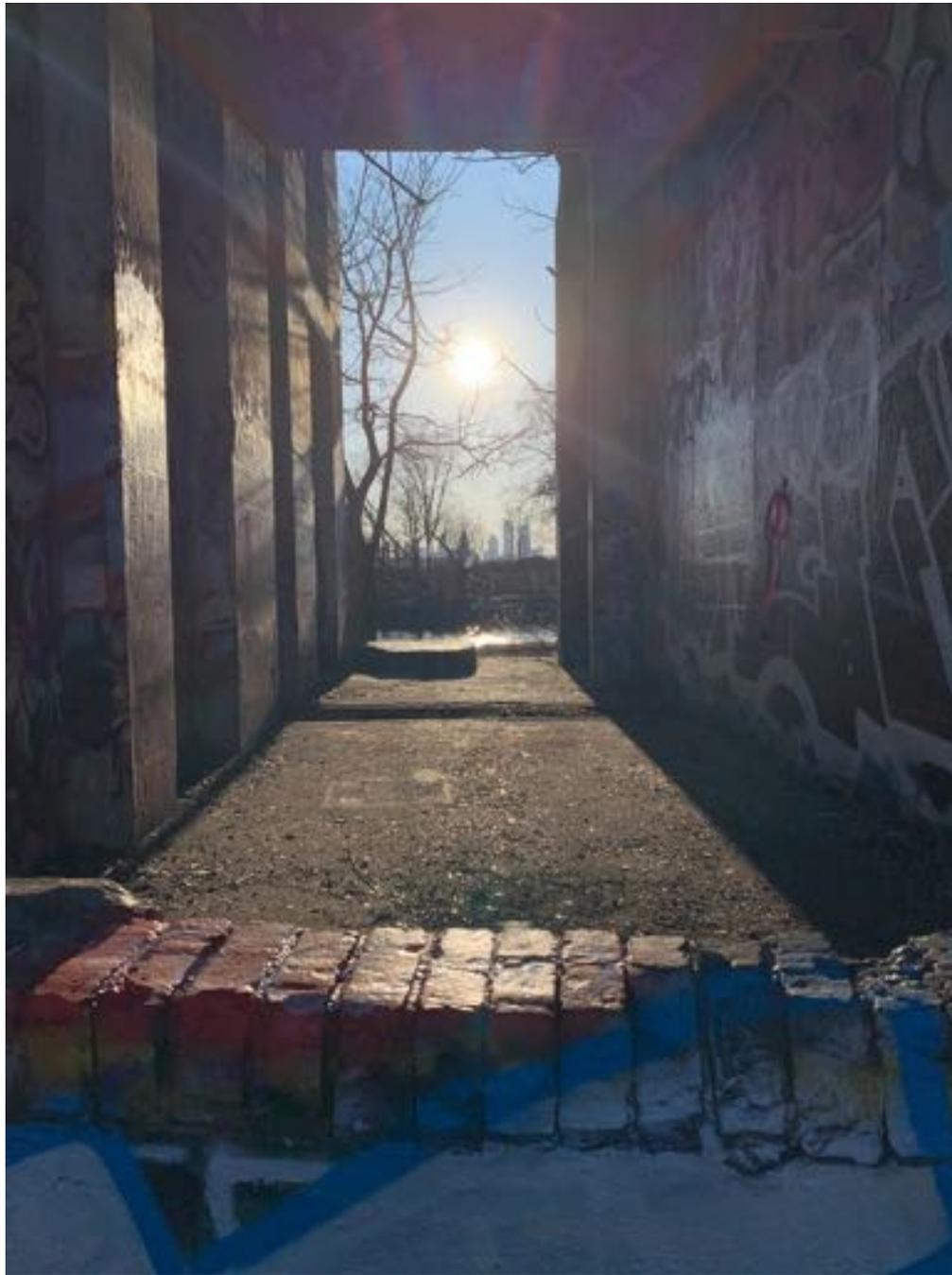
Shameika Black



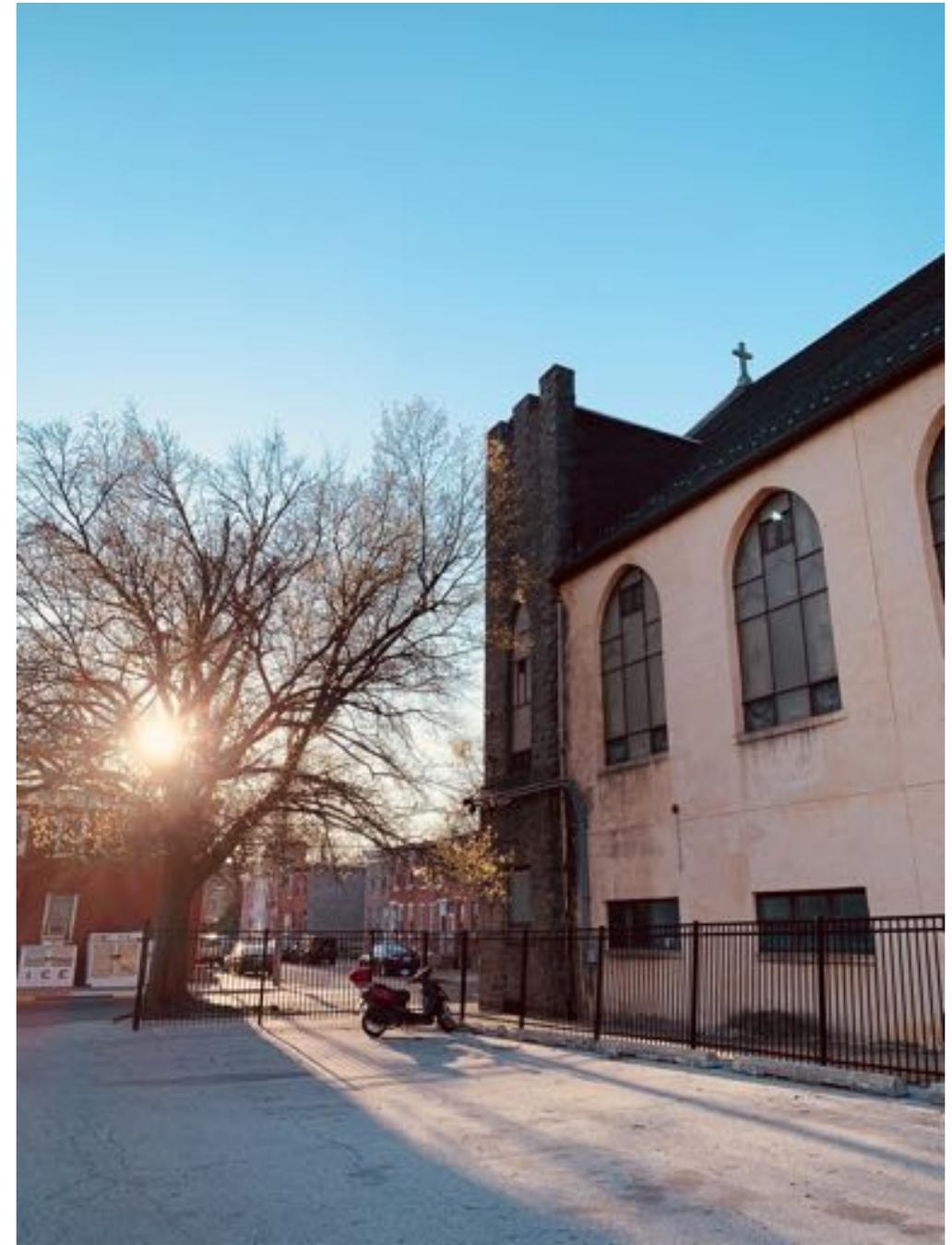
Reflection, 2020, digital photograph, 8 x 11 inches



Shade, 2020, digital photograph, 8 x 11 inches



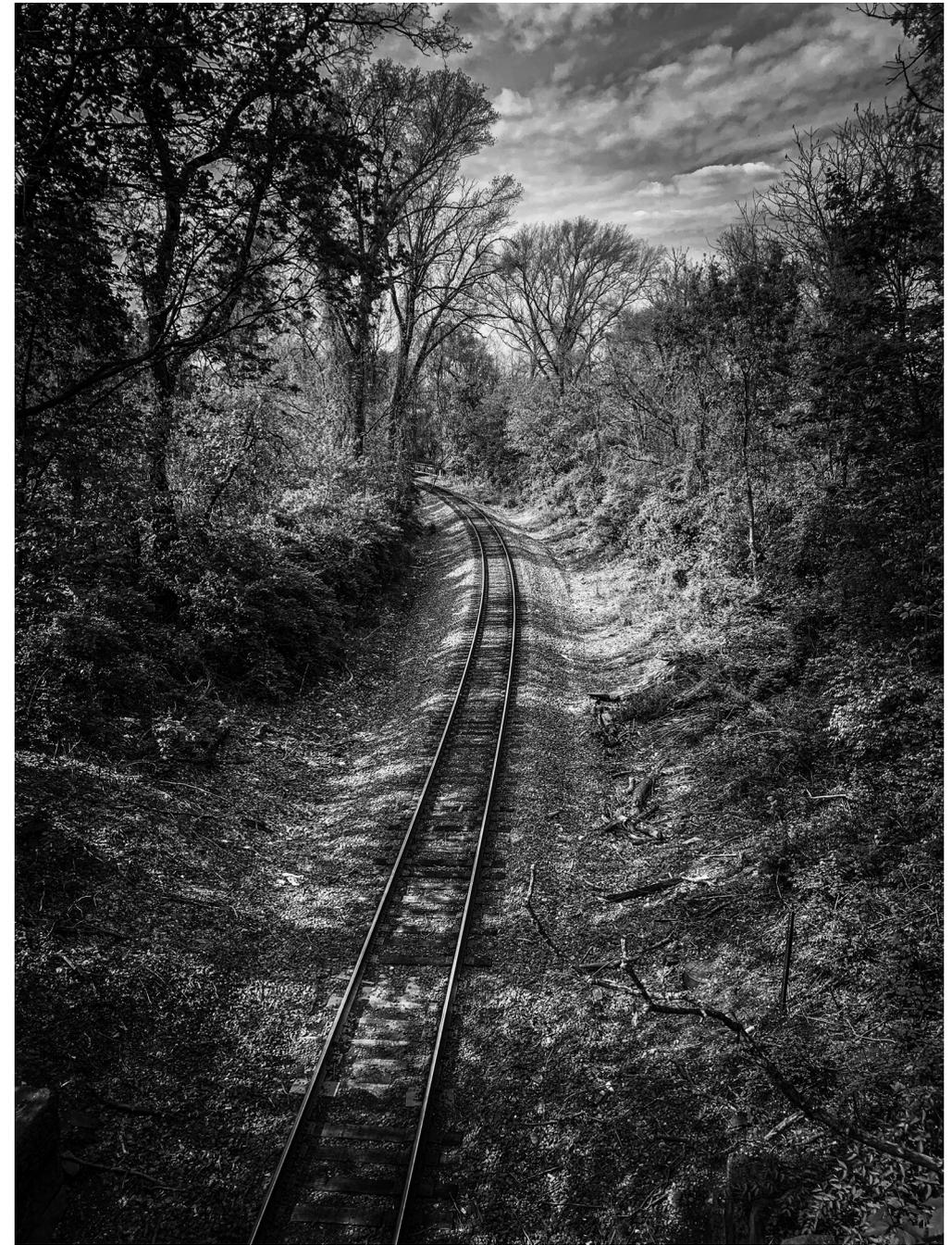
Cast Shadows, 2020, digital photograph, 11 x 8 inches



Awashed, 2020, digital photograph, 11 x 8 inches



Portal, 2020, digital photograph, 11 x 8 inches



Focal Point, 2020, digital photograph, 11 x 8 inches

Harold Buchanan



Great Egret in Breeding Plumage on Perch, 2017, Florida, digital photograph



American Alligator in Swamp, 2012, Louisiana, digital photograph



Chestnut-mandibled Toucan, 2012, Costa Rica, digital photograph



Boa Constrictor in Jungle, 2019, Peru, digital photograph

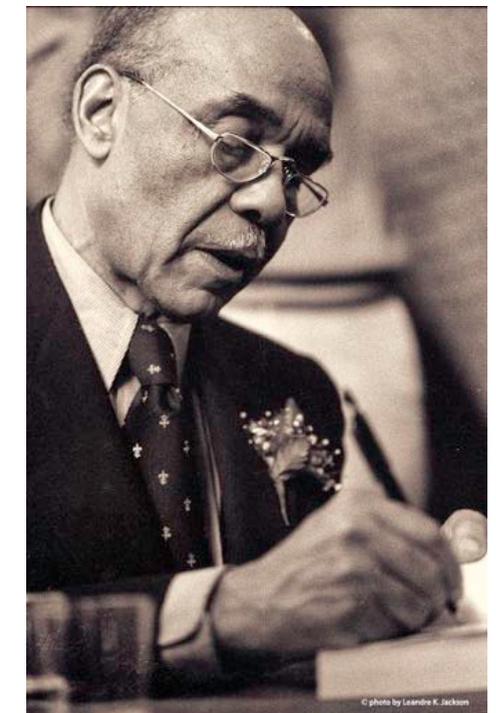
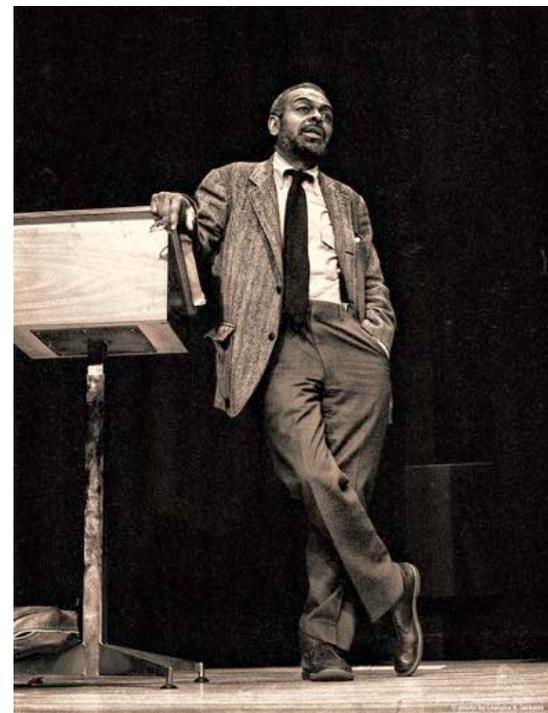
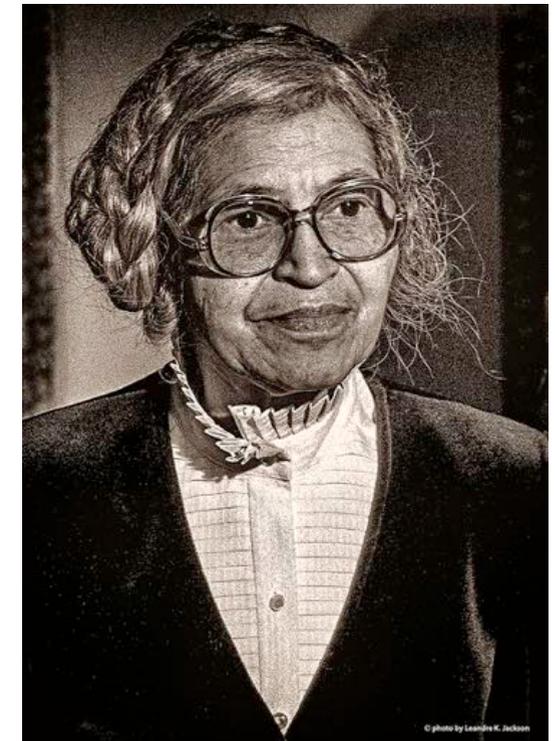
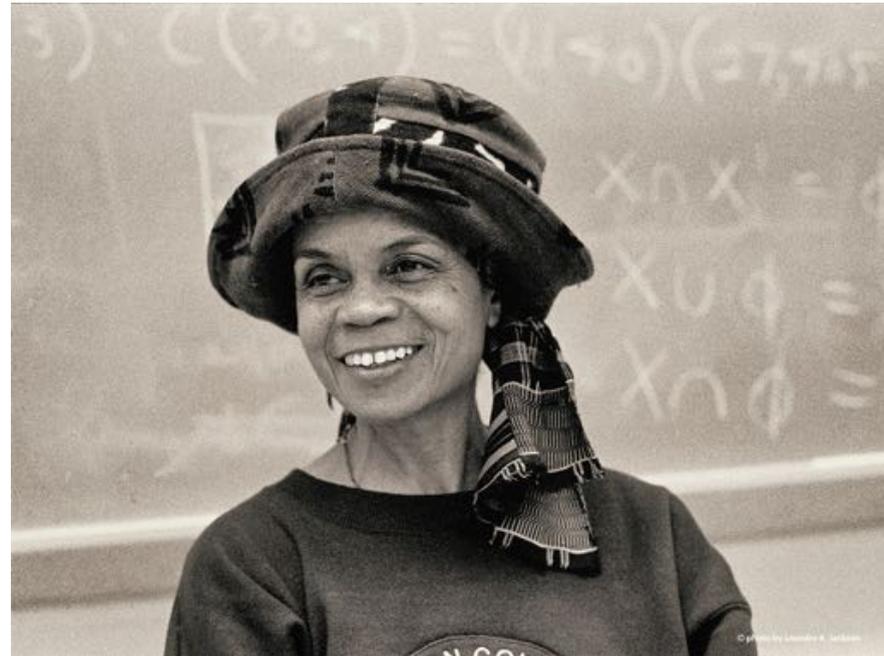


Andean Emerald Hummingbird Approaching Flower, 2016, Ecuador, digital photograph



Violet-tailed Sylph in Flight, 2016, Ecuador, digital photograph

Leandre Jackson



Unless noted, all images were printed from film negatives on archival inkjet paper. Dimensions vary. Above, top: *Sonia Sanchez*, 1996. Bottom: *Ntozake Shange*, 1989

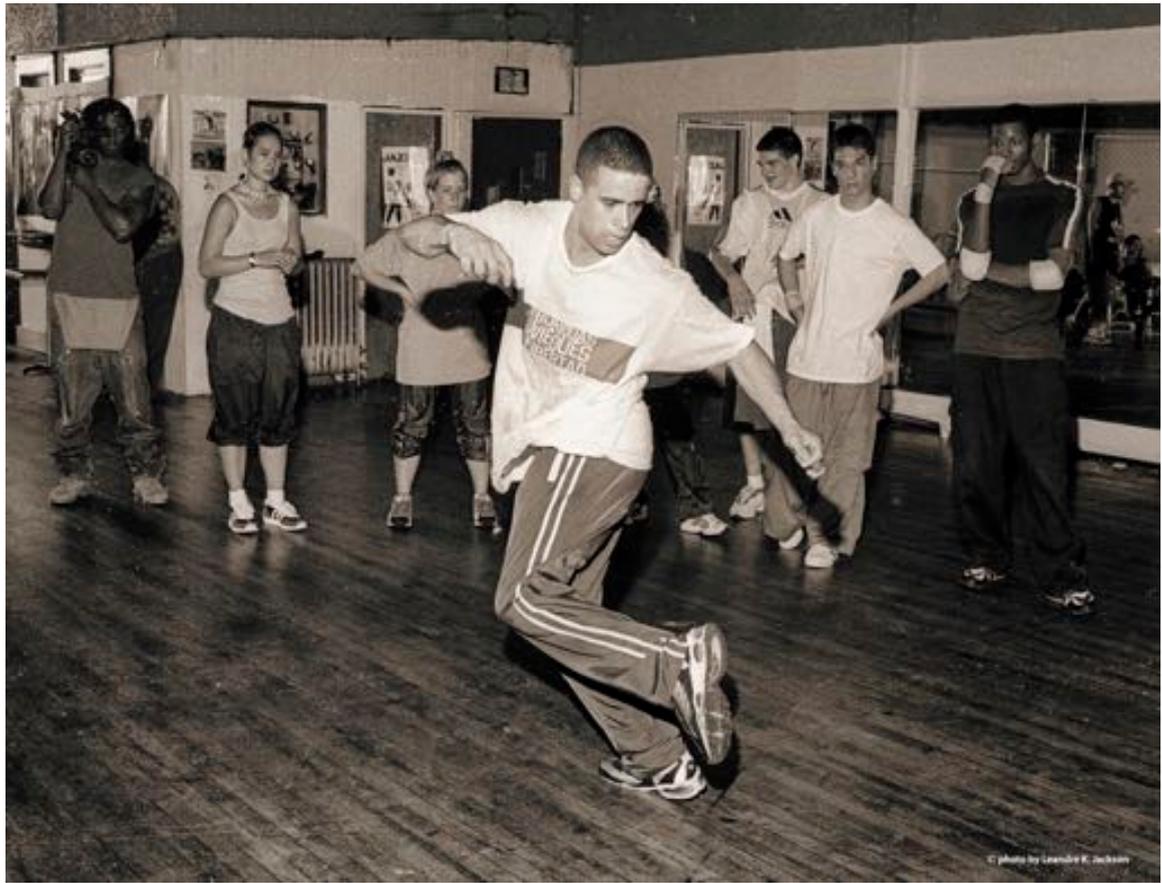
Clockwise from top left: *Bob Marley*, 1978; *Rosa Parks*, 1985; *Ralph Ellison*, 1987; and *Amiri Baraka*, 1986



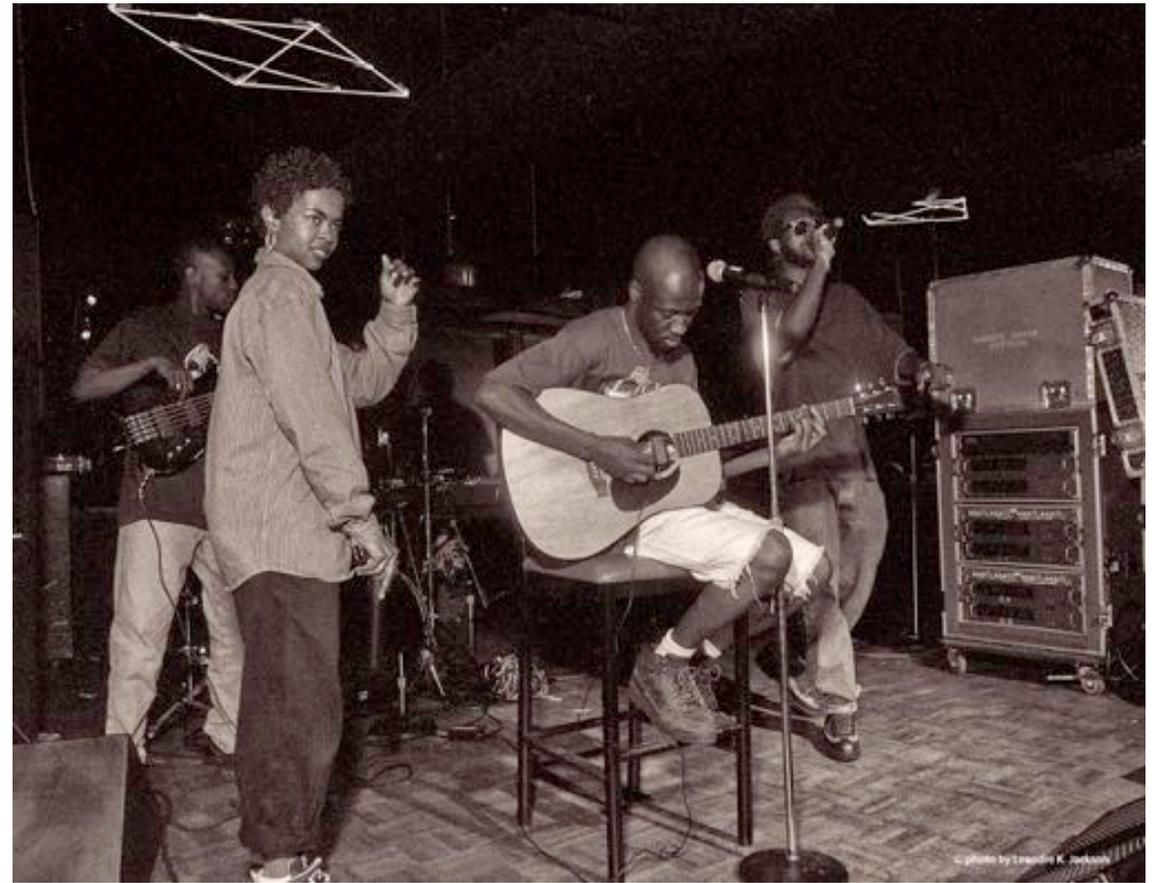
Nina Simone, 1979



Sonny Rollins, 1977



Crazy Legs, 2000



The Fugees, 1993



7th Ave. Hip Hop, 1999, Nikon digital image, archival inkjet print



All Day Sunday, multiple exposure with negatives from 1990's

May Thomas



Inner Works, 2007, oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches



Sakura, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 10 x 10 inches



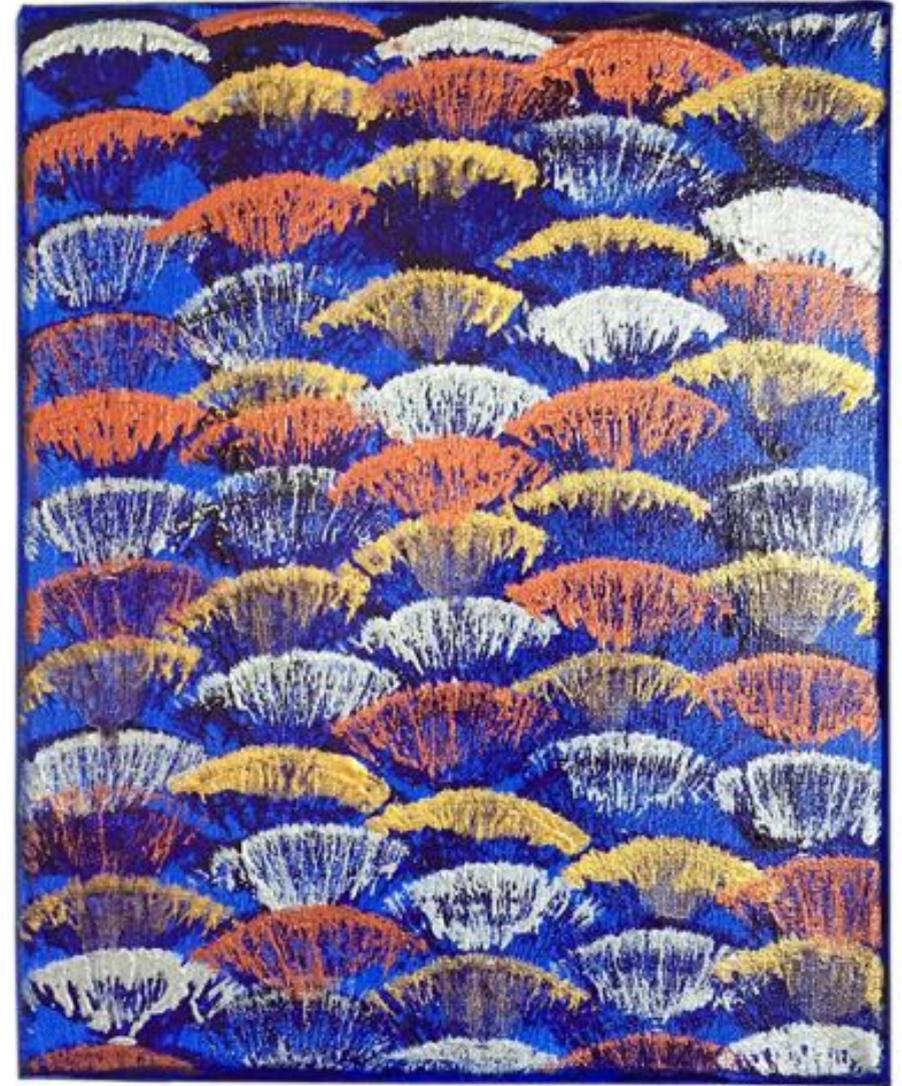
Untitled 1, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 8 x 10 inches



Untitled 2, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 8 x 10 inches



Fall Frenzy, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 8 x 10 inches



Metallic Jellyfish, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 8 x 10 inches

Reconnecting through Art Amid the 2020 Pandemic
by Andrea Packard '85, List Gallery director

In September 2019, when we began planning *Four Points of View: Alumni Making Art*, none of us imagined that the College campus would need to close in March to mitigate the transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Although List Gallery exhibitions were paused and Alumni Weekend was cancelled, we decided to create this catalog instead – a virtual exhibition of sorts. While confronting the myriad uncertainties and hardships caused by the pandemic, I feel especially fortunate to be able to collaborate with dedicated colleagues, such as Dion Lewis, Syd Carpenter, and Tess Wei, and sage alumni, such as Harold Buchanan '69, Leandre Jackson '75, May Thomas '76, and Shameika Black '11.

In ways unique to each of us, art helps us become more discerning and empathetic. Although physical presentations of art and in-person gatherings remain essential – and we can't wait for them to return – the current conditions of quarantine and social distancing remind us of the important role art plays in our lives and communities. During this historic crisis, visual art, music, film, and literature can broaden our perspectives, connect us more closely, and highlight what is best in humanity.

Although the four artists featured in this publication pursue distinct goals and provide different viewpoints, they have much in common with each other and many other Swarthmore alumni: wide-ranging intellectual curiosity, an interest in seeing the world from different perspectives, and a concern for both social justice and the environment. Each year, viewing works by newly practicing artists together with seasoned professionals reminds us that we all have the ability to create and share art.

Just as this catalog offers just a small sampling of each artist's more varied practice, it also provides a reminder of a much larger community of alumni, such as Njideka Ayunili Crosby '04, H'19 and Jake Beckman '04, who model new ways of thinking. Whether alumni exhibitions take place in the beautiful light-filled rooms of the List Gallery or the pages of a carefully-designed catalog, they allow us to appreciate the way Swarthmore provided us with much more than fixed skill sets or rigid notions of excellence. We leave the College ready for a lifetime of learning, outside-the-box creativity, and new beginnings.

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We would like to acknowledge the staff, student interns and community members
who have worked to support, uplift and maintain the BCC for the past 50 years.

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