



NEWS

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University of Richmond Museums opens **Action & Reaction: Looking at the Art of Social Justice**



Danny Lyon (American, born 1942), *A Toddle House in Atlanta is occupied during a sit-in when the SNCC staff and supporters take a break from a conference to demonstrate*, 1963 (printed later), gelatin silver on paper, 11 x 14 inches, Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, H2019.21.39, Gift of Steve and Linda Lee © Danny Lyon

The University of Richmond Museums opens ***Action & Reaction: Looking at the Art of Social Justice***, on view in the Harnett Museum of Art, January 19 through May 23, 2021. The topics of social justice, resistance, and solidarity, are addressed by the artworks, by the artists themselves and how they are present in their work, and by the viewers. Included in the exhibition are more than 80 historical and modern artworks from the University Museums' permanent collection, with highlighted presentations of the work of Judy Chicago, Avel de Knight, and Danny Lyon. A special section in the exhibition addresses social justice today and features contemporary work by Miles Wilson, UR '20, freelance photographer, and Sandy Williams, IV, interdisciplinary artist and part-time instructor of art, University of Richmond.

The exhibition is divided into four groupings, and each grouping presents a small selection of work by “anchor” artists that exemplify four themes:

- nationality and patriotism / Avel de Knight
- protest, civil rights, and activism / Danny Lyon
- personal activism, highlighting gender and identity / Judy Chicago
- social justice in contemporary society / Miles Wilson and Sandy Williams, IV

Additional artworks by other artists supplement each section, further highlighting and exploring the themes.

The themes of nationality and patriotism are highlighted by African American artist Avel de Knight (1921-1995). The artwork featured is a series of illustrations informed by the 1870 book *Army Life in the Black Regiment* by the New England abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson. The book recounts Higginson’s experience as a white leader of the Union’s first regiment of escaped slaves during the Civil War. Higginson portrayed Black soldiers as brave, committed, gentle, and deeply religious – qualities also captured in de Knight’s images, which were never published. Created almost 100 years after the book was written, de Knight’s powerful images were created during a time of great civil unrest in America.

Photographs by Danny Lyon (American, born 1942) exemplify the themes of protest, civil rights, and activism. During the summer of 1962, Lyon hitchhiked with camera in hand to join the Civil Rights Movement in Cairo, Illinois to sign with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) as their first staff photographer (1962-1964). During that time, Lyon produced images of the reality of Jim Crow South that members of the white media were avoiding. Looking back on this time, Lyon said, “because I was white, I could photograph things no Black person could.”

The themes of personal activism are presented alongside the work of Judy Chicago (American, born 1939). Chicago is considered one of the most prominent leaders of the Feminist Art Movement. Featured in the exhibition is “Retrospective in a Box” which is a 2008-2013 project that reflects on Chicago’s career as an artist, with each of the lithographs representing a significant period in the development of her work. As diverse as her themes may be, this group of works gives the viewer a glimpse into the challenges that Chicago faced when a “woman artist” was not accepted by the art establishment much less by popular culture.

The work of artists Miles Wilson and Sandy Williams, IV, is featured in a special section highlighting social justice today. Miles Wilson is a multidisciplinary artist, freelance photographer, designer, and creative architect currently based in Richmond, VA. He recently received his B.S. in Business Administration with concentration in marketing, University of Richmond, with a double major in Visual and Media Arts Practice. His photographic work was published in *The New York Times* (June 11, 2020) representing *RVA Magazine*, in the “Five Art Accounts to Follow on Instagram Now” feature.

In discussing his recent photography focused on the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, Wilson says, “when making images, especially when working in black and white, my main concern is finding a powerful subject that can speak to the larger theme of the work being made. Though this theme is flexible to some degree and takes shape as the photos are being made, during the protests I found myself focusing on the “individual” and capturing them in such a way that could be reflective of the BLM movement as a whole.”

An artist and filmmaker based in NYC and Richmond, VA, Williams is currently a part-time instructor of art (sculpture), University of Richmond. He graduated from the University of Virginia with a BFA, and from VCUarts with an MFA in Sculpture + Extended Media. He has had solo shows and exhibitions at several galleries and venues in Virginia, and most recently at Socrates Sculpture Park (New York), and Guadalajara 90210 (Mexico City).

Williams states that his interest is in “making work that opens up different conversations and internal dialogues through the many ‘views’ of a ‘thing’ that art might offer. It is often as much about pointing to “the thing” (the clothes or the monuments), or making mirrors to help us see ourselves, as it is about making new things to ‘try on’ in these reflections. ... As an educator, I’m interested in recalling these endangered histories through art, which has the ability to add to and become the record.”

Organized by the University of Richmond Museums, the exhibition was curated by Richard Waller, Executive Director, N. Elizabeth Schlatter, Deputy Director and Curator of Exhibitions, and Martha Wright, Assistant Curator of Academic and Public Engagement, University Museums. Research assistance was provided by Sophie McClellan, '23, art history and leadership double major, and the 2020 Curatorial Assistant, University Museums. The exhibition is made possible in part with support

from the University of Richmond's Cultural Affairs Committee and with funds from the Louis S. Booth Arts Fund.

Programming

UR Museums are currently working to provide programs and resources online to support and supplement the exhibition. We hope to offer programs featuring artists, curators, and musicians. Keep connected at museums.richmond.edu for the most up-to-date information about programs, exhibitions, and announcements.

Note: Images for press are available by contacting Heather Campbell, 804-287-6324 or hcampbel@richmond.edu

University of Richmond Museums comprises the Joel and Lila Harnett Museum of Art, the Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, and the Lora Robins Gallery of Design from Nature. Admission to all museums is free and open to the public.

Visit museums.richmond.edu or call 804-289-8276 for directions, hours of operation, and additional information about exhibitions and programs.