



***Between Them, 2019* • Deborah Roberts**

American, 1962

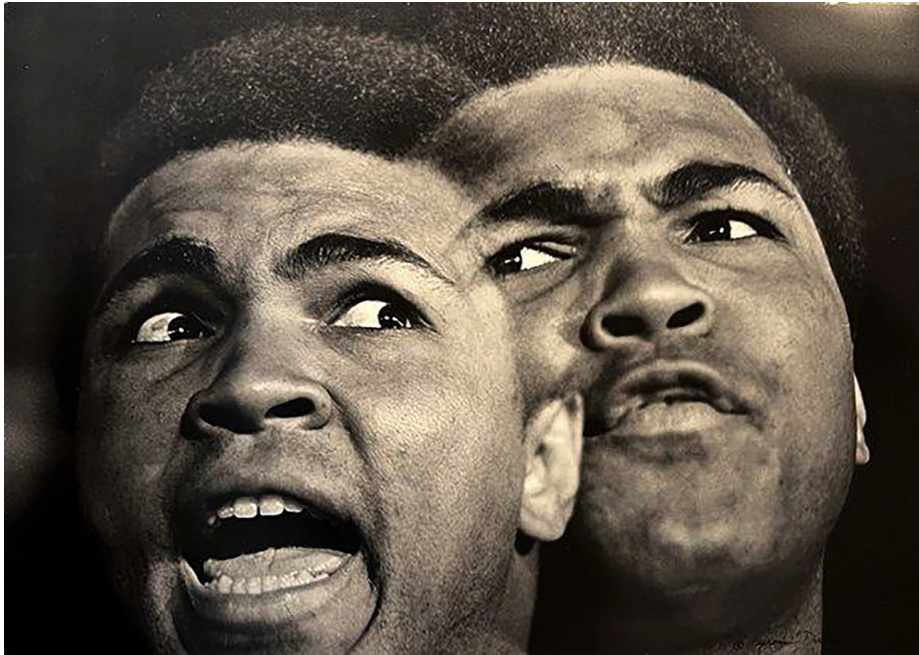
Mixed Media • Promised Gift

*“Whether I was aware of it or not, otherness has been at the center of my consciousness since the beginning of my artistic career. My early ideals of race and beauty were shaped by and linked through paintings of renaissance artists and photographs in fashion magazines. Those images were mythical, heroic, beautiful, and powerful and embodied a particular status that was not afforded equally to anyone I knew. Those images influenced the way I viewed myself and other African Americans, which led me to investigate the way our identities have been imagined and shaped by societal interpretations of beauty. Having one’s identity dismantled, marginalized and regulated to non-human status demands action.”*

**Background and Bio Details:** Born 1962 in Austin, TX, Deborah Roberts use of collage reflects the challenges encountered by young Black children as they strive to build their identity, particularly as they respond to preconceived social constructs perpetuated by the Black community, the white gaze and visual culture at large. Combining a range of different facial features, skin tones, hairstyles and clothes, Roberts explains that *“with collage, I can create a more expansive and inclusive view of the Black cultural experience.”* By combining collage with mixed media her figurative work explores the themes of race, gender and identity; her work reflects on the complexities faced and the experiences experienced. Her collages assemble a variety of materials—paper, paint, graphite, ink, photographs and fabrics—to arrive at a shared, poignant hybrid. In short, she creates a complex whole to address a multiplicity of meanings. Although her work may appear to be composed of “irrational” or illogical combinations, making them appear surreal or abstract, the work presents experimentations as well as personal and cultural explorations. Deeply moving and expressive, her work challenges what ideal beauty is (and is not). Her work has been exhibited internationally across the USA and Europe. Roberts’ work is in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC, New York; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York; The Studio Museum in Harlem, NYC, New York; LACMA, Los Angeles, California; the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia, Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York among several other institutions. She has always loved drawing!



**Thoughts on Her Work:** When one looks at Deborah Roberts work one immediately sees that she questions the construction of race and the racializing gaze endemic to Western culture. Her collages and text-based works not only articulate a critique of accepted typologies of the unified self but also affirm the untold value of difference. A viewer soon realizes that they must accept there are multiple meanings, double layers and lots of symbolism. By combining the figures of a young Black girl and two Black boys she shows what appears to be an “unfixed” identity. Each has their own character (and backstory) yet each is imbued with the knowledge of society’s pressures and what stereotypes are projected onto them. Yes, there is a playfulness in how they smile and are grouped together; there is a camaraderie seen in their relaxed togetherness. All are capturing our attention by looking directly at you. By the collaging their faces, there is an ambiguity inherent in the collaging particularly in the enlarged eyes. Deborah challenges you to realize that there is not only one way to see Black faces; there is not monolithic idea of Blackness. *Between Them*—done first as a collage and then with additional drawing and painting—disrupts and rebuilds by inviting the viewer to look for the humanity within ... as the eyes are looking to connect with you.



**Untitled (Portrait of Muhammed Ali), c.1975 • Tyrone Dukes**  
 American 1946-1983  
 Gelatin silver print

Gift of Fay M. Gallus and Richard M. Sweet, 2023.34.2

Powerful. In-your-face. A portrait of defiance. A portrait showing complexity. Different from the majority of his photographic work, by his overlay of Ali's emotions, he captured the fighter's outward – and inward – complicated selves and yes, essence of who Muhammed Ali was.

**Background and Bio Details:** Tyrone Dukes was born in St. Petersburg, FL and moved to New York City in 1967 after serving in the Air Force. He worked for several years as a copy boy and Teletype operator at The Daily News before eventually joining The New York Times as a Teletype operator in early 1972. He started taking pictures, snapping folks "on the street" in his neighborhood of Harlem. After a colleague saw his work, he was promoted to staff photographer in 1974. Before resigning because of illness in 1979, he won several publisher's awards for fashion and spot news photographs. He was one of the first African American fellows at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles in 1980 and 1981. When he passed at 37 years old (of pancreatic cancer) in 1983, he still lived in Manhattan.

**Thoughts on His Work:** As one of the New York Times' African American staff photographers, he was "one of the few" and so, as all others, he was assigned to photograph both "Negro" life and also the lives of the average New Yorker. Little is known of his thoughts on this. (*Personal FYI – I do know that my father (Jazz Musician, Alfred Walker Jr. knew Tyrone who was also on the New York Times as a photographer and that there was discussion about Ernest Cole, his award and his Harlem work).* This particular portrait is very different from others as it uses an overlay technique which he did not utilize often. Usually his images were carefully composed such as this one taken in New York City on June 7, 1972 that shows the long jumper Norman Tate in Van Cortlandt Park. It showcases his love of "complexity and drama" through his framing of the jump, the sun glinting and the lone observance of a man watching. Another comparison – his image of a young skater at Rockefeller Center (who became an Olympic champion), he asked her mom Ms. Eberly if he could photograph her daughter as he had noted how this young girl maneuvered "with grace and poise amid the fast movement of other skaters around her." To him she may have been very young yet already looked like a pro. It seems he was like that as a photographer – one who could either be on assignment or out-and-about and see "the power" of who he was photographing.





**Minnesota, 2020** • Jordan Casteel

American b. 1989

Oil on canvas

Private collection, promised gift on long-term loan to Mia

Making the ordinary important. By spotlighting people and people that one sees day-to-day, Casteel prompts viewers to meet the gaze of others and recognize our shared humanity. Anonymity and individuality coexist. This cropped “subway painting” zooms in on the everyday gestures observed yet with an identity concealed (but its inner life nevertheless present).

**Background and Bio Details:** Jordan Casteel was born 1989 in Denver, CO. She received her BA from Agnes Scott College, Decatur, GA for Studio Art (2011) and her MFA in Painting and Printmaking from Yale School of Art, New Haven, CT (2014). She has participated in group and permanent collection exhibitions such as Baltimore Museum of Art, MD (2023); St. Louis Art Museum, MO (2023); New Orleans Museum of Art, LA (2023); Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY (2021-2023); Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2022); The Modern, Fort Worth, TX (2022); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (2022); Pérez Art Museum, Miami, FL (2022); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA (2021); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA (2021); Art Institute of Chicago, IL (2021); Crystal Bridges, Bentonville, AR (2021); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL (2020); Kunsthal KAdE, Amersfoort, Netherlands (2020); MoCA Los Angeles, CA (2018); Studio Museum in Harlem, NY (2017 and 2016); and MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA (2017). Most recently, Casteel presented a solo exhibition entitled *In bloom* at Casey Kaplan, New York. Casteel is the recipient of a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship (2021).

**Thoughts on Her Work:** Identity, spirituality, trauma, pain, joy and power are just a few of the themes felt in her work. Originally part of the *Rituals of Resilience* audio/vision exhibition at Mia, this painting focuses on an everyday encounter with a neighbor. It invites recognition of a shared humanity, by capturing a moment of “just a person” on their way. It depicts, in luminous hues and nearly life-size proportions, a person of color and a landscape that is recognizable and relateable; we all know this place. Interesting to note that Casteel often centers her subjects in forward-facing, seated positions. This intimate bond formed between artist and sitter is revealed from the self-possessed expressions of her subjects, which, in turn, invites a direct connection with the viewer. To know – her paintings are pieced together from multiple photographs that she takes and reference a shared moment in time, during which a relationship is cultivated and continues to flourish long after the specific work is completed. insists upon the ordinary, offering scenes with both the informality of a snapshot and the frontality of an official portrait. In these richly colorful works, she draws upon ongoing conversations on portraiture that encompass race, gender, and subjectivity, connecting her practice to the legacy of artists like Alice Neel, Faith Ringgold, and Bob Thompson, among others. Casteel’s studies in anthropology and sociology also inform her works, which can often be read as a reflection on the presentation of the self in everyday life and as an investigation of the relationships that tie together intimacy and distance, familiarity and otherness.





**Subway Acrobats, 1959 • Jacob Lawrence**

American 1917 - 2000

Tempura on board

Myron Kunin Collection of American Art

L2014.234.55

The universal beauty of a people. An unapologetic social realist. A painter who expressed the struggles and aspirations. A proud Negro artist who strove to add a spiritual dimension to those who had not been seen as such. Abstract. Bright and colorful. The depicts the urban experience of riding the subway with standing men in suits, men and women reading, a woman knitting and two young boys “performing”. He even includes sparks from the subway tracks seen through the windows! Although the subject matter seems more distant from his socio-political works, Subway Acrobats still represents the social realities and insularity of urban American life. His point – the everyday is important and necessary to present.

**Background and Bio Details:** Born in New Jersey and raised from the age of 13 in Harlem, he was a Northeast native had Southern roots. He was the child of migrants who moved, together with millions of other African Americans, from the rural South to urban, industrialized Midwestern and Northeastern cities during the mass relocation known as the Great Migration (1915–1950s). He always maintained that he was “a child of the Great Migration,” which shaped the course of his own and his fellow African Americans’ lives. In 1942, with segregation in full force, he broke a racial barrier by becoming the first African American artist whose work was acquired by The Museum of Modern Art. Through his vivid, accessible visual storytelling, he presented the richness and complexities of African American history and culture both to his own community and to the larger world.

**Thoughts on His Work:** If the Great Migration provided him with geographical advantages, it was Harlem, then in the midst of the cultural and intellectual outpouring known as the Harlem Renaissance (1920s–1930s), that inspired him to make art that “sang” the stories of his people. As he once described his beloved neighborhood: *“All these people on the street, various colors, so much pattern, so much movement, so much color, so much vitality, so much energy.”* The textures of Harlem, and the narrative dynamism of the songs, Bible stories, sermons, and tales of his neighbors’ journeys north, shaped Lawrence’s approach to art making. He realized that through painting he, too, could give voice to the experiences of his people. What one the most important details to know is that he worked fast! His materials were quick-drying tempera paint and hardboard panels. Inexpensive and suited to his working method. He first sketched his images and scenes with a pencil, and then filled in his composition with a limited range of colors, working with only one color at a time. He kept his palette very simple. Yellows, greens, blues, reds. He didn’t mix his colors as he wanted them to be “pure”. He loved focusing on his people. By centering on the human figures as they were in ordinary places or situations he felt a lot of information about them would be clear and understandable. He wanted to convey the emotions, the lives of the ordinary and how their struggles mattered. He was known at “the foremost Negro artist” by the time he was 30 years old, and was one of the few painters of his generation who grew up in a black community, was taught primarily by black artists, and was influenced by black people. So I ask ... how does this work “compare” with Jordan Casteel’s?





**Entropia (review), 2004 • Julie Mehretu**

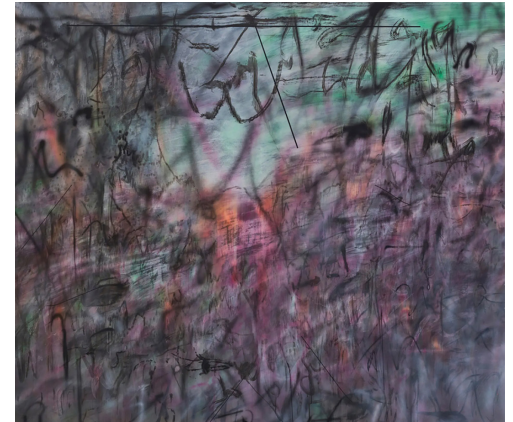
American (born Ethiopia), 1970

Color screenprint and lithograph

Publisher: Co-published by Highpoint Editions, Minneapolis and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

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Graphic. Intellectual. Compositionally dense. Many points of departure; Mehretu's work is a "phantom presence" seen in a highly abstracted gestural approach. It engages us in its dynamism and kinetic visual articulation of a contemporary experience, a depiction of social behavior, and the psycho-geography of space.



**Background and Bio Details:** Born in Ethiopia, Julie Mehretu and her family fled the country and settled in East Lansing, Michigan, where she completed high school and college. She received a B.A. from Kalamazoo College, Michigan, studied at the University Cheik Anta Diop, Dakar Senegal, and received a Master's of Fine Art with honors from The Rhode Island School of Design in 1997. Her work is featured in internationally acclaimed public and private art collections. Among her many achievements and awards, she is a recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship. She currently lives and works in New York City.

**Thoughts on Her Work:** Julie Mehretu's work engages us in a dynamic, visceral, energetic approach that is her modern depiction of social behavior captured in a geography of space that is fraught with psychological meanings. It is informed by a multitude of sources including politics, literature, music, architecture and have incorporated photographic images from broadcast media which depict conflict, injustice, and social unrest. The graphic images act as intellectual and compositional points of entry and departure; ultimately they remain mysterious and a fleeting presence due to her highly abstracted gestural hand. Handprints (which go back from prehistoric times)? They seem to be reflective of David Hammons or Yves Klein. Those graffiti gestures? New York City trains in the '80s. Those shaky marks? They seem reminiscent of Picasso or Philip Guston. There seems to be no exact explanation or answer to what one sees. Viewing her work is therefore an experience for the viewer. There are no 'complete' right or wrong answers. These densely layered and co-existing abstract paintings and prints allow her visions of abstraction be filled with energy through her topographic sensibility of global urban landscapes; it is her primary source of inspiration. *"By combining many types of architectural plans and drawings I tried to create a metaphoric, tectonic view of structural history. I wanted to bring my drawing into time and place"* Her integrated, complex drawing and mark-making (which include detailed references, building plans, and drawn components of known historic public architectural sites such as stadiums and notable government buildings) pulls us in and asks us to question and explore what is and what was. She enjoys experimenting, jumping between lithography, etching and drawing to convey ever-present shifting of space. Where would I place her work – nonliteral art movements such as Futurism to Constructivism; I also would posit that, regardless of format, her work involves symbolism as it draws from graffiti, city maps, and comic book graphics. To remember – her "mapping" is not of a specific place but of the many spaces she has experienced and lived.