

## A 'Constellation' of 26 Artists Represents the African Diaspora

By Antwaun Sargent — Dec 16 2015



*Faith Ringgold Echoes of Harlem, 1980 Paint on cotton 89 1/2 x 80 1/2 in. The Studio Museum in Harlem; Gift of Altria Group, Inc. Photo: Marc Bernier*

There are many resonating patterns that form when 26 artists are brought together in one exhibition. The Studio Museum (<http://www.studiomuseum.org/>)'s new group show, *A Constellation*, features eight permanent collection works alongside those of 18 contemporary artists to create an intergenerational visual dialogue through figurative paintings, abstraction, photography, and sculpture, offering an expansive understanding of

the concerns that inform artists' practices from the 1960s to the present. The exhibition "offers multivalent approaches to the profound complexity and nuance inherent in inquiries surrounding identity and existence," explains show curator Amanda Hunt in the exhibition catalog.



*Nona Faustine From Her Body Sprang Their Greatest Wealth, from the "White Shoes" series, 2013 Archival pigment print 30 x 40 in. Courtesy the artist*

Photographer Nona Faustine and artist Melvin Edwards point to the configuration of political voices that emerge in the exhibition. Faustine and Edwards represent works centered around American slavery and identity. Faustine's self-portrait depicts the artist standing nude, wearing white shoes, on top of a crate in downtown Manhattan. The 2013 image collapses the history of lower Manhattan as a site once held for the slave trade. It also calls for remembrance of the enslaved whose long forgotten contributions helped build America. While Edwards' sculpture *Working Thought*, made of chain links, a crowbar, and industrial-sized nails—part of the larger *Lynch Fragments* series—evokes the violence that slaves endured but, also speaks to the current state of violence disproportionately experienced by black Americans today. Artist Faith Ringgold continues the theme with *Echoes of Harlem*, a painting on a quilt, which calls attention to quilting as an artistic practice of enslaved black women.



*Melvin Edwards Working Thought from the "Lynch Fragment" series, 1985 Welded steel 8 1/2 x 6 in. The Studio Museum in Harlem; Gift of the artist*

Many artists in Studio Museum's exhibition also use their personal histories and utilize quiet moments of representation. Billie Zangewa's silk tapestry, *Mother and Child*, depicts a domestic scene that unpacks the power of the mundane. The artist plays a mother in the portrait and is poised to feed her child. It is a black family moment that is often not seen in a museum context. The ordinariness of the gesture provides a moment of reflection.

Aaron Fowler's sculptural painting, *Family*, shows the artist as a shepherd leading his kin to a promised land paved with rose petals. He employs materials such as cotton, salt, and assorted wood to compose the piece. Fowler poses a series of questions to the viewer about the place in which he hopes to take his family: What would the promise land look like? How can we get there together?

Thus, *A Constellation* is largely a show about the varied artistic output from artists who represent the African Diaspora. If there were one art work that summed up the theme of the exhibit, it would be David Hammons' *Too Obvious*, a broken piggy bank with cowrie shells that were used as currency in Western Africa. The work explores the connections between Africa, as the motherland, and its descendants, who are peppered all across the globe.



*Billie Zangewa Mother and Child, 2015 Silk tapestry Approximately 51 x 54 in. Courtesy Afronova, Johannesburg, South Africa Photo: Courtesy the artist*



Aaron Fowler Family, 2015 Frosted flakes, cotton balls, salt, assorted wood, player piano, acrylic, oil, blue jeans, leather, bamboo earring, red rag, fan, CDs, Easter grass 152 x 133 1/2 x 16 in. Courtesy the artist



*David Hammons Too Obvious, 1996 Cowrie shells and porcelain ceramic 7 x 12 x 14 in. The Studio Museum in Harlem; Gift of Edward Clark, New York Photo: Marc Bernier*

*A Constellation* is on view through March 6 at The Studio Museum in Harlem. For more information, click here (<http://www.studiomuseum.org/exhibition/constellation>).