

ART HISTORY INSIGHTS

FEBRUARY 2020

The monthly newsletter that brings you selected articles of interest and opinion from the world of art history and visual culture. February is Black History Month.

WHAT IF OUR TEXT BOOKS WERE BLACK

Naomi Beckwith is international curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. In this fantastic radio series she argues that we must reconsider our models of education, and invites artists to imagine a new cultural textbook that reinstates Black cultural figures who've been sidelined from history and culture. 'If we change our exhibitions without changing our textbooks, then nothing changes at all'. This episode includes an interview with artist Kerry James Marshall.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000c9mj>

'WHEN YOU PUT BLACK PEOPLE IN THE PICTURE, WHAT SHOULD THEY BE DOING?'

For more than 35 years artist Kerry James Marshall has made paintings that have taken as their subject the representation of black figures – how they have been marginalised within the Western pictorial tradition, reduced to bit players within the mainstream narrative of art history.

<https://www.apollo-magazine.com/kerry-james-marshall-interview/>

WHO WAS CHARLES WHITE?

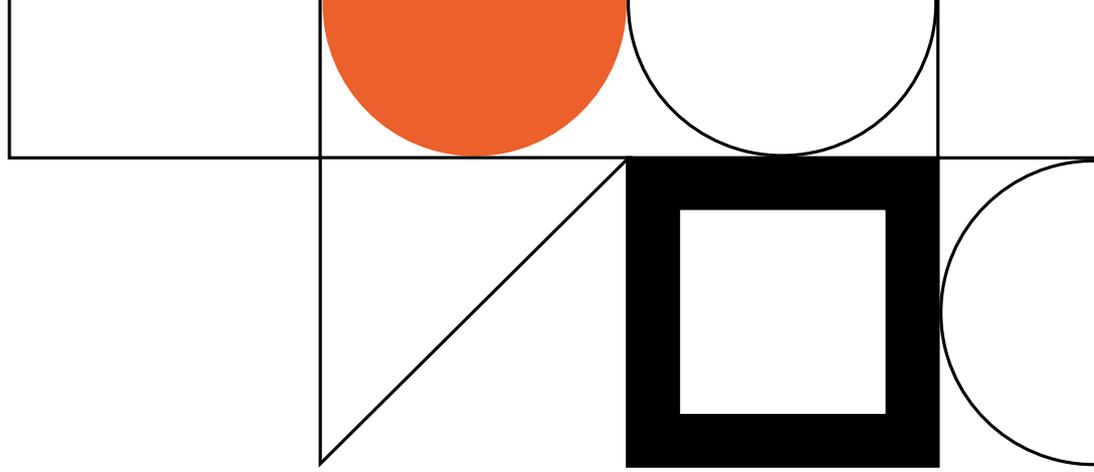
Charles White was one of the first artists to depict black life in fine art, and he taught Kerry James Marshall. He was a hugely influential person in the 1920s 'New Negro Movement' (later known as the 'Harlem Renaissance') which promoted a renewed sense of racial pride, cultural self-expression, economic independence, and progressive politics. After his premature death in 1979, the art world largely forgot about Charles White (which is often the case with black artists). In 2018 MOMA staged a long over due exhibition of his work.

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/xw9j4q/moma-exhibition-black-artist-charles-white>

HARLEM RENAISSANCE

The Harlem Renaissance was a turning point in international black cultural history. It was a formative movement, of avant-garde black culture and creativity, which began in the early 1920s and ended just before World War II. How did a group of artists in Manhattan use art to forge a new African-American identity.

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/new-african-american-identity-harlem-renaissance>



THE VISIONARY INFOGRAPHICS OF W.E.B DU BOIS

For the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, African American activist and sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois led the creation of over 60 charts, graphs, and maps that visualized data on the state of black life. In 1909, Du Bois, alongside other campaigners for African American civil rights, formed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and founded the magazine, 'The Crisis'. Du Bois was an influential intellectual within the Harlem Renaissance, introducing concepts like 'double consciousness'. An exhibition of W.E.B du Bois work is showing at the House of Illustration in London until 1 March.

<https://hyperallergic.com/306559/w-e-b-du-boiss-modernist-data-visualizations-of-black-life/>

WHO WAS AUGUSTA SAVAGE?

Augusta Savage was a hugely talented sculptor, but her work, and history, remains largely unknown. She established herself as a sculptor, civil rights activist and an influential educator with her Savage Studio of Arts and Crafts in Harlem. She gained artistic notoriety after she created busts of prominent figures in the black community such as W.E.B. Dubois and Marcus Garvey.

<https://timeline.com/the-most-important-black-woman-sculptor-of-the-20th-century-deserves-more-recognition-af0ed7084bb1#.83r1alcmq%E2%80%AC>

YOUR INSIGHTS

We promote a broad and inclusive art history, and look to engage with as wide an audience as possible. Please get in touch with articles you think may be of interest for newsletter. We welcome all content suggestions.

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Image credit: detail from Portrait of Helene Yellin, 1923, by William Roberts