

Learning Places Fall 2018

# SITE REPORT #2A

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## Thinking Frame:

In the reading, audio, and video assignments for this week a number of spaces for voices of protest are discussed. The Guerilla Girls broadcast their messages across a wide variety of media and places: posters on walls and billboards, handouts on the sidewalk, t-shirts on bodies, projections on walls, installations in abandoned buildings and art galleries, magazines, zines, websites, etc. Next Epoch produces ecological art in neglected urban wastelands. Decolonize This Place conducts protests in museums, without prior permission for use of the spaces. As a group, these interventions could be described as unsanctioned or subversive events performed in spaces that were not designed or curated specifically for protest.

In response to these kinds of activities (and perhaps in recognition--aesthetically or culturally of their importance), there have been increased efforts by community leaders and cultural institutions to create spaces for critical or dissenting voices. Landers, et al, describes strategies to create sanctioned spaces for protest in libraries, plazas, and parks. Similarly, the Brooklyn Museum now seeks to create spaces for alternative, minority, and resistant cultures and voices through curation and architectural interventions.

The question remains whether resistant practices, alternative performances, and protest are more effective when sanctioned or unsanctioned. Where is Dread Scott's *Impossibility of Freedom in a Country Founded on Slavery and Genocide* more effective, in the original 2014 performance on a street or represented in photographic form in a museum in 2018 as part of a curated exhibition?

As you go through the site report collecting images and documenting your ideas, keep these tensions in mind.

## SITE OBSERVATIONS

Insert two images of Brooklyn Museum's facades. The first of a more **traditional architectural feature** for a public civic space and the second an **untraditional architectural feature**.



The Division



Intrusion

**Why did you choose these images? As you look at each, what do you expect to encounter once you enter the building? Explain.**

The first image, *The Division*, to me proves that even though architecture has changed as centuries pass by, traditional architecture can (and should) be preserved. In this image you can see how the inside brick structure is divided from the outside stucco-looking part of the building, by glass and metals. Even though this is happening, they coexist quite peacefully because both old and new are getting their way and being represented. The second image, *Intrusion*, shows an angled cantilevering piece of glass with metal mullions and tall forms behind it supporting it. This proves how the way of building has evolved. Also, it looks like the more modern materials caused a massive intrusion on history itself. Looking at both images, once you enter the building, you expect to encounter both ancient (or aged) and recent forms of art and news, to match the exterior facades.



Roy DeCarava  
1919-2009  
Coltrane on soprano,  
Detail silver print  
Courtesy of Sherry D.  
DeCarava Archives

The Man Giving it His All

**The stated *mission* of the Brooklyn Museum is “to create inspiring encounters with art that expand the ways we see ourselves, the world and its possibilities.” Take a photo of one piece of artwork that expands the way you see yourself or the world. Give the photograph a caption and explain why it expands your vision of yourself or the world.**

This photograph by Roy DeCarava, titled “Coltrane on soprano, New York, 1963,” spoke to me. The man playing the instrument looks like he is playing it with all of him, and that he’s enjoying doing so. I think that everything (or at least most things) we do should be given our all. We shouldn’t half-do things because why do something in the first place if you won’t give it 100% of yourself? This man that looks like he is performing with all he’s got expands my vision of myself and the world and what I want both of us to do.



The Walls Are the Pages to the Book

**The stated vision of the Brooklyn Museum is to create a place “where great art and courageous conversations are catalysts for a more connected, civic, and empathetic world.” Consider the curated areas of the museum. How is space arranged in order to create “courageous conversations”? Can you describe conversations between spaces?**

The spaces in the Brooklyn Museum are arranged like a book. The (unattached to the ceiling) walls look like (and are) the pages in the book and the art on those walls are the content inside of the book. Most books tell stories and the humongous ones that I have visualized/imagined in this museum are no different. Such stories in this exhibition create courageous conversations amongst the individuals walking through it and the space itself. The bigger the space, (usually) the bigger the art pieces, possibly the inclusion of 3D pieces towards the center of the area, and overall, there’s probably just more going on. This room would grasp more of your attention like the climax in a story.



Storyline

**Insert an image of designed space (not art objects themselves) that suggest “connection.” How is the concept of “connection” articulated in the way art is arranged in space? (Consider the walls, walkways, display boards, pedestals, rooms, etc.)**

The arrangement of the art in a space emphasizes the concept of connection, especially if its display is kept consistent. Like in my image, if the frame type, color, and size, of several pieces are the same, they are linked and should then be thought of as a part of a storyline.

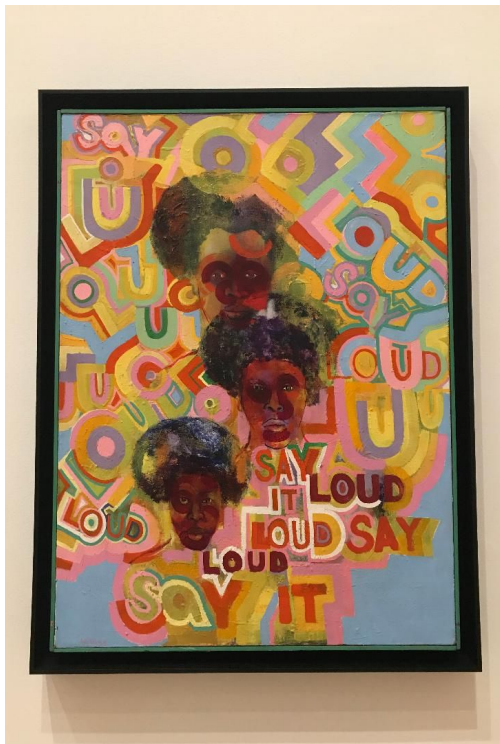
**Brooklyn Museum declares that “since we see ourselves as a conduit for open sharing and learning, we accept the controversies that may accompany courageous conversations.” Consider the way art objects are arranged in space for the *Half the Picture* exhibition in relation to viewers. How would you describe the arrangement of objects for viewers. Did the arrangements accept controversies? Did they encourage courageous conversations? If so, how? If not, why?**

The arrangements of the objects for the viewers in *Half the Picture* was beautifully set up. Aesthetically, it had vibrant colors, different frames of all sizes and materials, 3D pieces, pedestals that give pieces the attention they need, and video screens showing tapes that actually catch your attention. The arrangements themselves are controversies. They all contradict each other because there is so much going on in a small space compared to other exhibitions in the same building. Due to all this variety, they definitely do encourage courageous conversations.

# SITE REPORT #2B

Based on your observations at the Brooklyn Museum, **develop a complex research question** about the relationship between 1 piece of art that you viewed and a social or political issue.

Remember, your research question should be specific and researchable.



## Gerald Williams

born 1941

*Say It Loud*, 1969  
Acrylic paint on linen  
Wilks Family Collection

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"Say it loud—I'm black and I'm proud!" are lyrics from a popular James Brown song recorded in 1968. The phrase amounted to an unofficial Black Power slogan, indicating racial pride.

Gerald Williams completed this painting a year after he helped form AfriCOBRA. Born in Chicago, he earned a master of fine arts at Howard University before working at Northeastern Illinois University, where he met AfriCOBRA cofounders Jeff Donaldson and Wadsworth Jarrell.

### Research Question:

**In the late 1960s, when African Americans were subject to racism/discrimination in the art world, how did AfriCOBRA (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists) impact the African American community and their racial pride?**

**Find 2 sources.** \*For this report, one of your sources MUST be an academic journal article. Your other source can be a news article, internet source, or book.

**1 source** should have to do with the **artwork, artist, artistic style, or some element of the work** you chose. For example, if you were interested in learning more about realistic photography depicting women engaged in domestic activities, you might search for sources about “domestic imagery AND photography” or “realistic photography” rather than sources about the specific artist.

**1 source** should be about the **social / political issue** that is articulated in your research question. This source may or may not have to do with art.

**Write an MLA citation for each source:**

**Source 1**

“Africobra Now!” *International Review of African American Art*, vol. 21, no. 2, Apr. 2006, pp. 2–4. EBSCOhost, citytech.ezproxy.cuny.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=25120645&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

**Source 2**

Cotter, Holland. “Radiant and Radical: 20 Years of Defining the Soul of Black Art.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 13 Sept. 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/09/13/arts/design/soul-of-a-nation-review-brooklyn-museum-black-power.html?register=google.

Describe the process you used to find these sources including any **keywords** and the **specific search engine or tool** you used to search.

- For my first source, using EBSCOhost, I searched up “AfricOBRA or Black Art Movement or African American art” and “racial pride or black power.” Filtering my search, I also made sure my results would only come up as scholarly journals.
- For my second source, using The New York Times, I searched up “racism in art in the 1960s.” Before finding an article there, using EBSCOhost, I searched up “racism or discrimination” and “art” and “1960s,” but I didn’t like the results that I got and therefore went on nytimes.com.

In a sentence or 2, describe the main point of each source. Then consider: how do these sources address all or part of your research question?

### **Source 1**

My first source talks about AfriCOBRA's ambition in trying to revive the African heritage that wasn't accepted in the art world that was dominated by White artists in the late 1960s. In having so, the African American community found the courage, support, and racial pride to express themselves through art using many colors and textiles. The scholarly journal said that "[a] key tenet of the group's creed was to make 'images that all African people can dig on directly. Images that jar the senses and cause movement... images designed for mass production. Inexpensive. [They wanted] everybody to have some.'" This source addresses all of my question because it explains what AfriCOBRA stood for and the impact it had on Blacks.

### **Source 2**

Pertaining to African Americans, the author of my second source, Cotter, said that "[n]o citizens know the national narrative, and its implacable racism, better than they do. And no artists have responded to that history-that-won't-go-away more powerfully than black artists." My second source includes descriptions and information about a bunch of art that was born during and after the Black Movement. Such art that fed their racial pride and did grow, as more and more Black artists freed their creativity. The source also brings up the racism that tried to stop African American artists from shining in the world of art. This source addresses the social issue of racism part of my question.

Describe ways the two sources you chose are similar and different. Would it be difficult to integrate these two sources into a single writing assignment? Why or why not?

Aside from one being a scholarly journal and the other an article from The New York Times, both sources also tackle different things. These things aren't far away from each other though. My second source touches upon racism in art as a whole and even mentions what my first source is mainly about, AfriCOBRA. It wouldn't be difficult to integrate my two sources into a single writing assignment because I made sure that they spoke the same language of "The Black Movement" and "Black Power." I wanted my second source to be about racism in (specifically) art and not just racism in general because (that's too broad and) I wanted both my sources to be related to each other. If a third source was required though, I would've probably wanted that one to be about racism (overall) towards African Americans in the mid 1900s.



What other sources or further information would you need to answer your question? Where would you look for that information?

I think that doing more research about racism towards African Americans in the mid 1900s in general, not only pertaining to art, would thoroughly answer my question. Having more sources or information on that social issue would give my audience, who all have no knowledge on past racism, of course, a better understanding of the depth and importance of my topic. That would make them think something along the lines of “wow. Blacks were even neglected in the art scene,” because it’s what I thought as well. Conclusively, there has to be books, videos, and even other exhibitions in museums and galleries, that contain further information about the topic(s) in my question, so I’d continue there.