



Culture Type Picks: The 14 Best Black Art Books of 2017

by Victoria L. Valentine on Dec 19, 2017

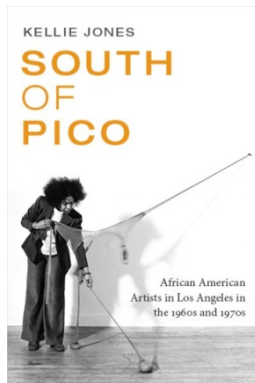
SOME OF THE BEST ART BOOKS published this year focus on the past and the present. Exhibition catalogs such as “We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965-85” and “Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power,” and the scholarly publication “South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s,” document the Black Arts Movement and the artists and works that defined the period. The activities of that era provided a path for the increasingly influential voices and innovative practices of new generations of contemporary artists working today, figures such as Nina Chanel Abney, Mark Bradford, and Adam Pendleton, whose recent publications are also among the best of 2017. Featuring work by and about people of African descent, the following Culture Type Picks are exceptional volumes. (Titles listed in order of publication date.)



“Betye Saar: Easy Dancer,” Edited by Mario Mainetti, Chiara Costa, Elvira Dyangani Ose, with a foreword by Miuccia Prada, Patrizio Bertelli, and contributions by Richard J. Powell, Deborah Willis, and Kellie Jones (Fondazione Prada, 320 pages). | Published Feb. 28, 2017

1. Betye Saar: Easy Dancer

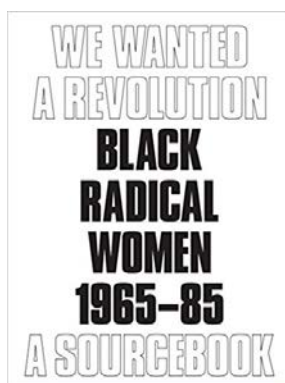
This modest-scale, more than 300-page catalog documents “Uneasy Dancer” (Sept. 15, 2016-Jan. 8, 2017) at the Prada Foundation. The comprehensive survey of Betye Saar’s career was her exhibition show in Italy. “I am an uneasy dancer in a slow dance that is my ninetieth revolution around the sun,” Saar writes in part in the catalog. The volume features writings by Richard Powell, Deborah Willis, and Kellie Jones and is dominated by an amazing, detailed timeline charting Saar’s work and life from the moment she was born in 1926 through 2016, when “Uneasy Dancer” opens in Milan. Handsomely designed, the chronology is illustrated with documentary photos and images of her work. A uniquely bound volume, each page appears to be a fold out, but is indeed attached at the center spine. Another catalog, “Betye Saar: Still Tickin” was published in August. It features the artist in conversation with Sara Cochran, a bounty of full-color images of the artist’s work, and writings by Saar from 1973-2016.



“South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s,” by Kellie Jones (Duke University Press, 416 pages). | April 7, 2017

2. South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s

A curator and professor of art history and archeology at Columbia University, Kellie Jones spent the past decade researching and connecting with African American artists who got their start in Los Angeles half a century ago. Her efforts yielded “Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles, 1960-1980,” a groundbreaking exhibition, and accompanying catalog, that explored the work of Maren Hassinger, John Outterbridge, Noah Purifoy, Senga Nengudi, David Hammons, Betye Saar, and Charles White, among others. Jones delves further into the transformational period with “South of Pico.” She considers the work of assemblage artists within the context of the 1965 Watts Rebellion; examines the impact of artist-run institutions including the Brockman Gallery founded by Alonzo Davis and Dale Brockman Davis, Suzanne Jackson’s Gallery 32, and several Samella Lewis ventures; and charts the emergence of the “performative impulses” and de-materialized practices of Hammons, Hassinger, and Nengudi. Both a scholarly triumph and a fascinating read, this book provides the backstory for some of the most consequential artists to emerge from the Black Arts Movement and examines the work, projects, and initiatives they fostered.



“We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85: A Sourcebook,” Edited by Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hockley (Duke University Press, 320 pages). | Published April 21, 2017, paperback

3. We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85: A Sourcebook



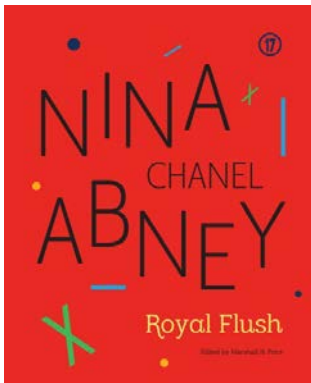
The groundbreaking exhibition “We Wanted a Revolution” examines for the first time the experiences and perspectives of women of color during the emergence of second-wave feminism. Featuring works by Emma Amos, Jeff Donaldson, Jae Jarrell, Wadsworth Jarrell, Lois Mailou Jones, Barbara Jones-Hogu, Samella Lewis, Lorraine O’Grady, Howardena Pindell, Faith Ringgold, Lorna Simpson, and Carrie Mae Weems, among many others, the show presents a diverse group of artists who lived and worked at the intersection of art production, political activism and social change. Organized by the Brooklyn Museum, the exhibition is on view at the California African American Museum through Jan. 14, 2018. An invaluable reference, this volume is a true sourcebook, containing reproductions of key documents, articles, and publications from the period. Writings by curators Catherine Morris Rujeko Hockley, and many of the artists represented in the show, give context. The book begins with the words of Audre Lorde and, on the last page, the volume concludes with a poetic tribute to artist Beverly Buchanan (1940-2015) by Alice Walker.



“Alice Neel: Uptown,” by Hilton Als, with a foreword by Jeremy Lewison (David Zwirner Books/Victoria Miro, 144 pages). | Published May 23, 2017

4. Alice Neel: Uptown

Curated by Hilton Als, “Alice Neel: Uptown” was a revelation. Anyone familiar with the work of Alice Neel (1900-1984) has seen her portraits of people of color, but to realize the depth of this aspect of her practice and view more than 30 of these images presented together was a moving experience. Her portraits are defined by precise outlines, expressive brushstrokes, and her use of color to bring out the personalities of her subjects. Considered one of the most important American portrait painters of the 20th century, Neel had little interest in flattery, but rather sought to capture the complexity of her sitters. For the exhibition, Als, a critic at *The New Yorker*, selected paintings that portray African Americans, Latinos, and Asians, and other people of color—neighborhood children, fellow artists and progressives among whom the artist lived in Spanish Harlem and the Upper West Side. Als has a connection with Neel. The two share a dedication to the diversity of New York City and, in his introduction to the fully illustrated catalog, he describes her as an essayist on canvas. Throughout the volume he provides backstories for the paintings, a variety of musings, as well as biographical information about her subjects. Many of them are significant figures, but not widely known, such as scholar and social critic Harold Cruise (whose portrait graces the cover of the catalog); artist Faith Ringgold; Ron Kajiwarra, a graphic designer at *Vogue* magazine; and civil rights activists James Farmer and Hugh Hurd, who was also an actor.



“Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush,” Edited by Marshall N. Price (Duke University Press, 124 pages). | Published May 26, 2017

5. Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush

It’s been a banner year for Nina Chanel Abney, a relatively young artist known for her provocative, politically charged paintings articulating the complexities of contemporary society. She presented her first solo museum exhibition at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University in 2017 and her inaugural exhibitions at Jack Shainman Gallery and Mary Boone Gallery are currently on view in New York. This catalog, another first, documents the Nasher show, a 10-year survey exploring the arc of her practice which has evolved from a more painterly style to decidedly emphatic approach, mixing figuration and abstraction with a riot of bold color, symbols, and meaning. Illustrated with full-color images of her paintings throughout, this publication includes a preface by Richard Powell, contributions from Marshall N. Price and Natalie Y. Moore, and a great conversation between Abney and curator Jamillah James of ICA Los Angeles.

“The organized chaos of Nina Chanel Abney’s paintings owe some debt to her wide-ranging art historical and cultural influences. Bringing together the dynamism of Picasso (particularly the captivating polemic tableau *Guernica*), Robert Colescott’s acerbic historical reimaginings, and an incisive distillation of pop cultural and socio-political content, Abney’s work presents the figure in stunning and curious detail. Her fondness for ambiguity reveals itself in cryptic strings of text and fractured bodies with mismatched parts askew, updating for the digital age the surrealist exercises of chance poetry and the exquisite corpse.”

- Jamillah James, *Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush*



“Kerry James Marshall,” by Greg Tate,[†] Charles Gaines,[†] and Laurence Rassel (Phaidon Press, 160 pages). | Published June 12, 2017

6. Kerry James Marshall

A tribute to Kerry James Marshall’s grand practice, Phaidon’s recent publication punctuates the fanfare surrounding the three-venue tour of “Mastry,” the artist’s 30-year survey and accompanying catalog. Many early and more recent works are illustrated and considered in this volume, including the 1991 painting “Blue Water Silver Moon (Mermaid),” which earns an entire essay by Laurence Rassel. Other features include a lengthy, amazing conversation between Marshall and Los Angeles artist Charles Gaines; an essay by Greg Tate on the artist’s figures, which he calls “Marvellously Black Familiars”; and a chronology illustrated by the catalogs and brochures that have documented Marshall’s exhibitions over the years.



“Mark Bradford: Tomorrow is Another Day,” Edited by Christopher Bedford and Katy Siegel, with contributions by Peter James Hudson, Anita Hill, Sarah Lewis, Katy Siegel, Zadie Smith, James Baldwin, W.E.B. Du Bois (Gregory R. Miller & Co., 230 pages). | Published June 27, 2017

7. Mark Bradford: Tomorrow is Another Day

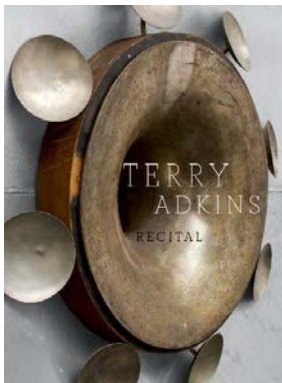
In representing the United States at the 2017 Venice Biennial, Mark Bradford recognized both the personal significance and national import of the honor. The artist conceived and re-conceived the exhibition in his Los Angeles studio, eventually presenting paintings, sculptures and video the reflect his individual voice, collapse the division between artist and ordinary people, and emphasize his belief in the social and cultural influence of art, particularly in this historic, political moment. The accompanying catalog documents this ambition. It’s a



panoramic offering that brings together the wise, ever-relevant words of James Baldwin and W.E.B. Du Bois, with the highly readable contributions of Anita F. Hill on the intersection of law, policy, art and injustice; Sarah Lewis on the art of productive dissent; and Zadie Smith on Bradford's video "Niagara" and the larger meaning of one's strut, swagger and sway. Photographs of Bradford from childhood through the years animate a wide-ranging interview with the artist conducted by curator Christopher Bedford. A generous section of full-color images of the exhibition works and installation views concludes the volume.

"Made in Los Angeles for the world to see in Venice, 'Tomorrow is Another Day' achieves the democracy and pluralism the times require. It is no accident that this statement comes from a person whose social being—as black, gay, working class—has long been discounted. When the center—money, social power, and even simple everyday stability—is concentrated among the smallest number of people in history, what is called marginal is bigger than ever; it encompasses most of us. Bradford is the right artist for this historical moment, when, as he says, "Our progressive voices are needed—needed to mobilize the margins. The periphery is massing."

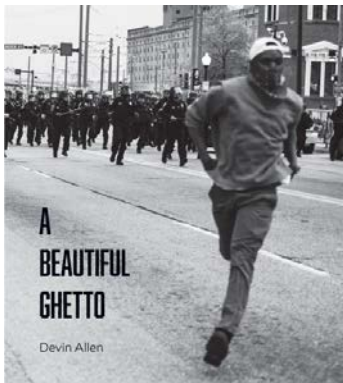
— Christopher Bedford and Katy Siegel, *Tomorrow is Another Day*



"Terry Adkins: Recital," Edited by Ian Berry, with contributions from Anthony Elms, Okwui Enwezor, Cheryl Finley, Charles Gaines (Prestel, 224 pages). | Aug. 11, 2017

8. Terry Adkins: Recital

When Terry Adkins (1953-2014) died suddenly three years ago, this catalog was in development. Understandably delayed and pushed back a number of times, the volume was finally published a few months ago. Well worth the wait, it's a fitting tribute to a multidisciplinary artist who expressed himself through music, sculpture, installations, and performance. In 2012, Ian Berry curated "Recital," Adkins's 30-year survey at the Tang Teaching Museum. Berry writes in the catalog, "Adkins grew up deeply invested in visual art, music, and language. His approach to artmaking is similar to that of a composer, and the sequence of images in this book is conceived as a score creating interplay among pieces in different media and from diverse bodies of work." Lavish illustrations are interspersed with written contributions by Adkins, Charles Gaines, Lauren Haynes, Adrienne Edwards, and George E. Lewis, among others; an archive of writings about the artist's work; interviews with Adkins conducted by Berry and Okwui Enwezor; and a loving postscript from Merele Williams Adkins, the artist's widow.

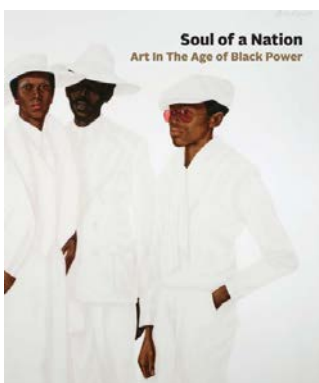


“A Beautiful Ghetto,” by Devin Allen with contributions by D. Watkins and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (Haymarket Books, 124 pages). | Published Sept. 12, 2017

9. A Beautiful Ghetto

Capturing the Baltimore protests in response to the 2015 police killing of Freddie Gray, Devin Allen’s photographs went viral on social media and gained nationwide attention from mainstream media. The amateur photographer’s beautifully striking images of the realities of race, poverty, and the gulf between the police and the community in Baltimore earned him a Time magazine cover, a museum exhibition, and a Gordon Parks Foundation fellowship. This publication brings together page-after-page of his documentary images of the uprisings and revealing portraits of everyday life in the city. Brief contributions by D. Watkins, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Wes Moore, Aaron Bryant, and Gail Allen-Kearney, give context and tee up the volume.

“This book is a visual story of the uprising. It’s also the story of Baltimore, Freddie Gray, and so many countless others who grew up, work, and raise their families in places like Baltimore. This book is to challenge the stigma, to show the beautiful side of the ghetto, and hopefully to inspire others to love, respect, and invest in our communities. This book is for you.”
— Devin Allen, Beautiful Ghetto



“Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power,” Edited by Mark Godfrey and Zoé Whitley, with contributions by Linda Goode Bryant, Susan E. Cahan, David Driskell, Edmund Gaither, Jae Jarrell, Wadsworth Jarrell, and Samella Lewis (D.A.P./Tate, 256 pages). | Sept. 26, 2017

10. Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power



Organized by the Tate Modern in London, the exhibition “Soul of a Nation” features art made between 1963-1983, a time of radical change in the United States. During the two-decade period, young black artists were trying to navigate the intersection of art, politics, and identity. Many struggled to determine their purpose and balance a desire to make important, complex art work and also reflect their experiences and the state of race in America. The show presents work by more than 60 artists, working both individually and within artist collectives such as Spiral and AfriCOBRA. Featuring “What’s Going On” by Barkley L. Hendricks on the cover, the catalog provides a visual journey through the period with documentary photographs and full-color images of art and ephemera, coupled with writings by Mark Godfrey and Zoe Whitley. The curators expound upon a score of topics, from the Studio Museum in Harlem, Just Above Midtown Gallery, The Black Photographers Annual, and Emory Douglas and the Black Panther newspaper to abstraction shows, black women artists, FESTAC ’77, and the Wall of Respect and mural movement. Meanwhile, figures from the era, including Samella Lewis, David C. Driskell, and Jae and Wadsworth Jerrell, contribute reflections.

“Soul of a Nation,” meanwhile, was chosen as [the] exhibition title to emphatically assert that however much individuals had to fight for acknowledgement and recognition within their own country, they are undeniably, indelibly part of that nation. There is no America without African Americans. The story of art in America is incomplete without acknowledging Black American artists.”

— Mark Godfrey and Zoe Whitley, *Soul of a Nation*



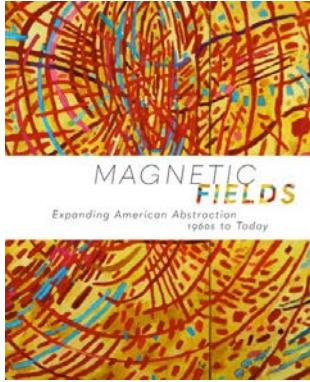
“Adam Pendleton: Black Dada Reader,” Edited by Stephen Squibb, with contributions by Adrienne Edwards, Laura Hoptman, Tom McDonough, Jenny Schlenzka, and Susan Thompson (Koenig Books, 352 pages). | Published Sept. 26, 2017

11. Adam Pendleton: Black Dada Reader

The conceptual practice of Adam Pendleton is particularly compelling because his artistic output is tethered to a rigorous intellectual vision. His practice centers around language, abstraction, history, and identity. Spanning painting, sculpture, printmaking, video, writing and performance, he describes his output as Black Dada. Earlier this year, the Brooklyn-based artist told the New York Times that Black Dada is “a way of articulating a broad conceptualization of blackness.” To further explore the theory, he has published the “Black Dada Reader,” bringing together cultural figures past and present. Pendleton employs the words of W.E.B. Du Bois, Stokely Carmichael, LeRoi Jones, Sun Ra, alongside contributions



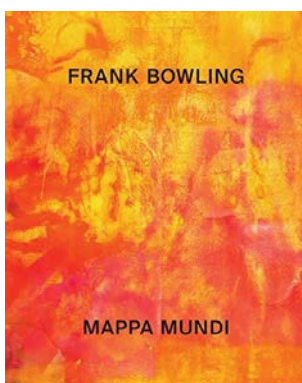
by artists Ad Reinhardt, Joan Jonas, Adrian Piper, William Pope.L, Thomas Hirschhorn, and Stan Douglas, and curators and critics Adrienne Edwards, Laura Hoptman, Tom McDonough, among others.



“Magnetic Fields: Expanding American Abstraction, 1960s to Today,” Edited by Erin Dziedzic and Melissa Messina, with text by Valerie Cassel Oliver, Lowery Stokes Sims, et al. | Published Oct. 24, 2017

12. Magnetic Fields: Expanding American Abstraction, 1960s to Today

Presenting the work of 21 artists spanning four generations between 1891 and 1981, “Magnetic Fields” is the first exhibition to explore comprehensively black women artists working in abstraction. On view at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., through Jan. 21, 2018, the show considers their work in context with each other and the larger history of abstraction. The catalog documents the exhibition with contributions by Lowery Stokes Sims and Valerie Cassel Oliver. Other curators write briefly about individual artists—Mavis Pusey, Maren Hassinger, Chakaia Booker, Lilian Thomas Burwell and Sylvia Snowden. In terms of visual presentation and design, there is nothing particularly compelling or out of the ordinary about this volume. However, its substantive significance in terms of documenting this important exhibition can’t be overstated. Sims writes, “That black abstraction has been positioned at the center of social and political issues is thought provoking, especially given that black abstract artists are increasingly achieving wider recognition as people accept that not all artwork by African Americans has to be perceived through a polemic lens.”

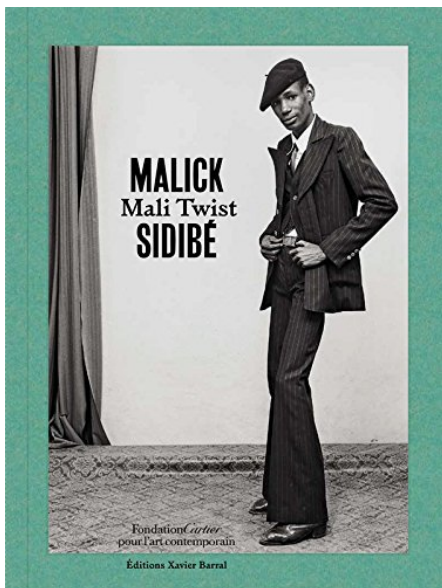




“Frank Bowling: Mappa Mundi,” Edited by Okwui Enwezor, with contributions from Frank Bowling, Kobena Mercer, Anna Schneider, and Zoe Whitley (Prestel, 256 pages). | Published Nov. 7, 2017

13. Frank Bowling: Mappa Mundi

Curated by Okwui Enwezor with Anna Schneider, “Frank Bowling: Mappa Mundi” remains on view at Haus der Kunst in Munich through Jan. 7, 2018. A broad survey of rare and never-before exhibited large-scale paintings, the exhibition centers around the artist’s monumental “map paintings” created between 1967 and 1971, the year they were first shown at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The catalog is enveloped in his 1970 painting “Middle Passage.” The metaphoric blend of red and yellow graces the front and back covers as well as the volume’s edges. Inside, Enwezor opens the catalog by stating the significance of the artist’s “modulated color abstraction,” describing his work as “some of the most ambitious and remarkable painting of any artist to emerge in postwar Britain.” Highlights include contributions by Tate Curator Zoe Whitley and British artist Lynette Yiadom Boakye; reproductions of correspondence between Bowling and critic Clement Goldberg; a selection of writings by Bowling from 1969 to 1993; and full-color illustrations of the exhibition works and additional works from 1960-2015.



“Malick Sidibé: Mali Twist,” with text by André Magnin, Brigitte Ollier, Manthia Diawara, Robert Storr (Fondation Cartier Pour L’Art Contemporain/Editions Xavier Barral, 296 pages). | Nov. 28, 2017

14. Malick Sidibé: Mali Twist

Celebrated photographer Malick Sidibé (1936-2016) is recognized for his vibrant images of youth culture in his native Bamako, Mali, in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. This fully illustrated



catalog documents “Malick Sidibé: Mali Twist,” the retrospective exhibition currently on view at the Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain in Paris through February 2018. The volume is rife with formal portraits and candid images from throughout his career. The fabulous cover image is just the beginning. Countless black-and-white images are interspersed with brief scholarly writings by André Magnin, Brigitte Ollier, Manthia Diawara, and Robert Storr, printed on mint-green pages. The contributions include a first-person essay by Sidibé in which he details his path to photography. First published in 1998, it was updated for this publication. The catalog concludes with an added bonus: Folders reproduced from Sidibe’s archive containing party images from 1963-1974, complete with his handwritten labels and notes. **CT**

“That Sidibé was a ‘popular’ photographer rather than a satirical pop commentator on vernacular culture—which is to say he was a photographer firmly grounded in his environment who combined work-for-hire portraiture with his own exploratory documentation of the quotidian excitement of his Bamako neighborhood—made him one among several recording angels of a new generation of urban Africans, of which the other most important Malian example was his elder, Seydou Keita. Together they framed our vision of this crucial period of postcolonial history, and, while there were certainly many other perspectives in play, theirs are the signal oeuvres we have in this medium.” — Robert Storr, *Malick Sidibé: Mali Twist*.

<http://www.culturetype.com/2017/12/19/culture-type-picks-the-14-best-black-art-books-2017/>