

An abstract painting featuring several faces, including a prominent one on the left and another on the right. The background is a dense, chaotic mix of vibrant colors like yellow, blue, red, and green, with thick, expressive brushstrokes.

GATEWAYS

**African American Art
from the Key Collection**

TRAVELING EXHIBITION SERVICE



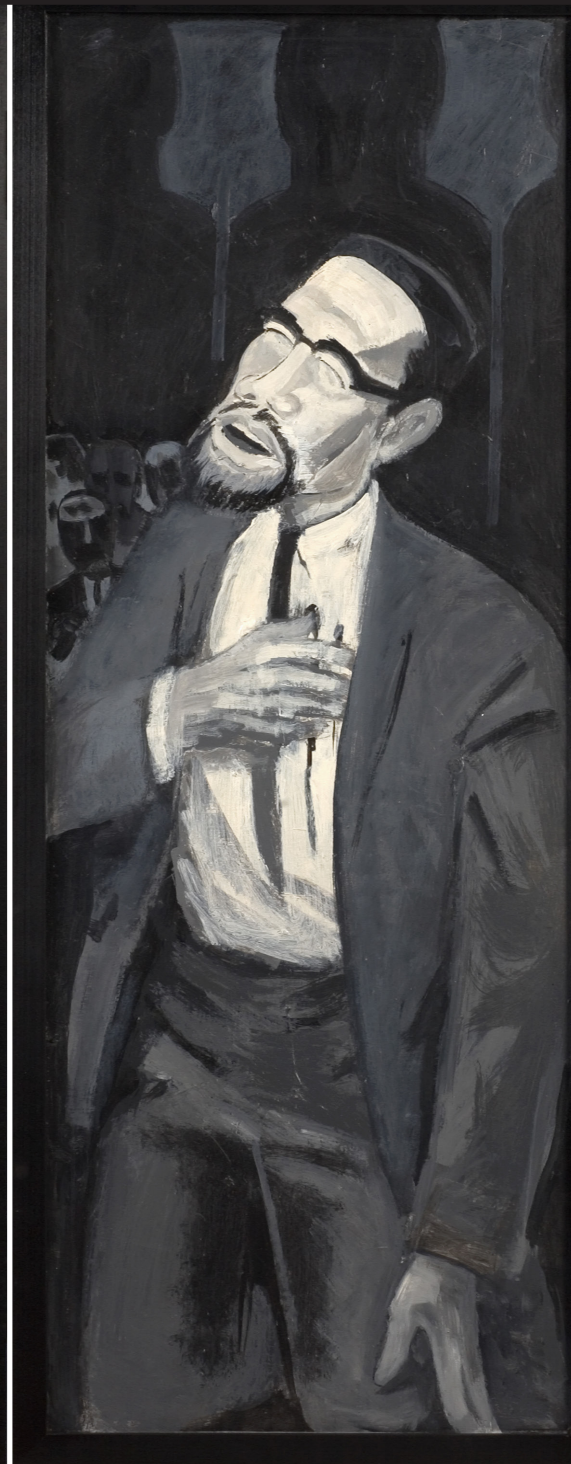
INTERNATIONAL
ARTS AND ARTISTS

GATEWAYS

African American Art from the Key Collection

African American Art from the Key Collection presents 88 works of art in numerous media from the collection of Eric Key. Key is an arts administrator, curator, investor, and collector with decades of deep involvement with the art world, particularly its ever-evolving relationship with African American artists. Key began collecting African American art in the early nineties, long before the arts industry and society at large began to grant these artists the belated (and still insufficient) recognition they enjoy today. Over the years, Key has amassed an impressive collection of African American art, with the dual purpose of exploring his own identity as a Black man in America while providing financial support to individual artists. His intent has always been to help preserve America's Black experience in the arts, and to benefit the many communities of which he has been a part—opening gateways for artists, African Americans, and conversations about race, identity, and America.

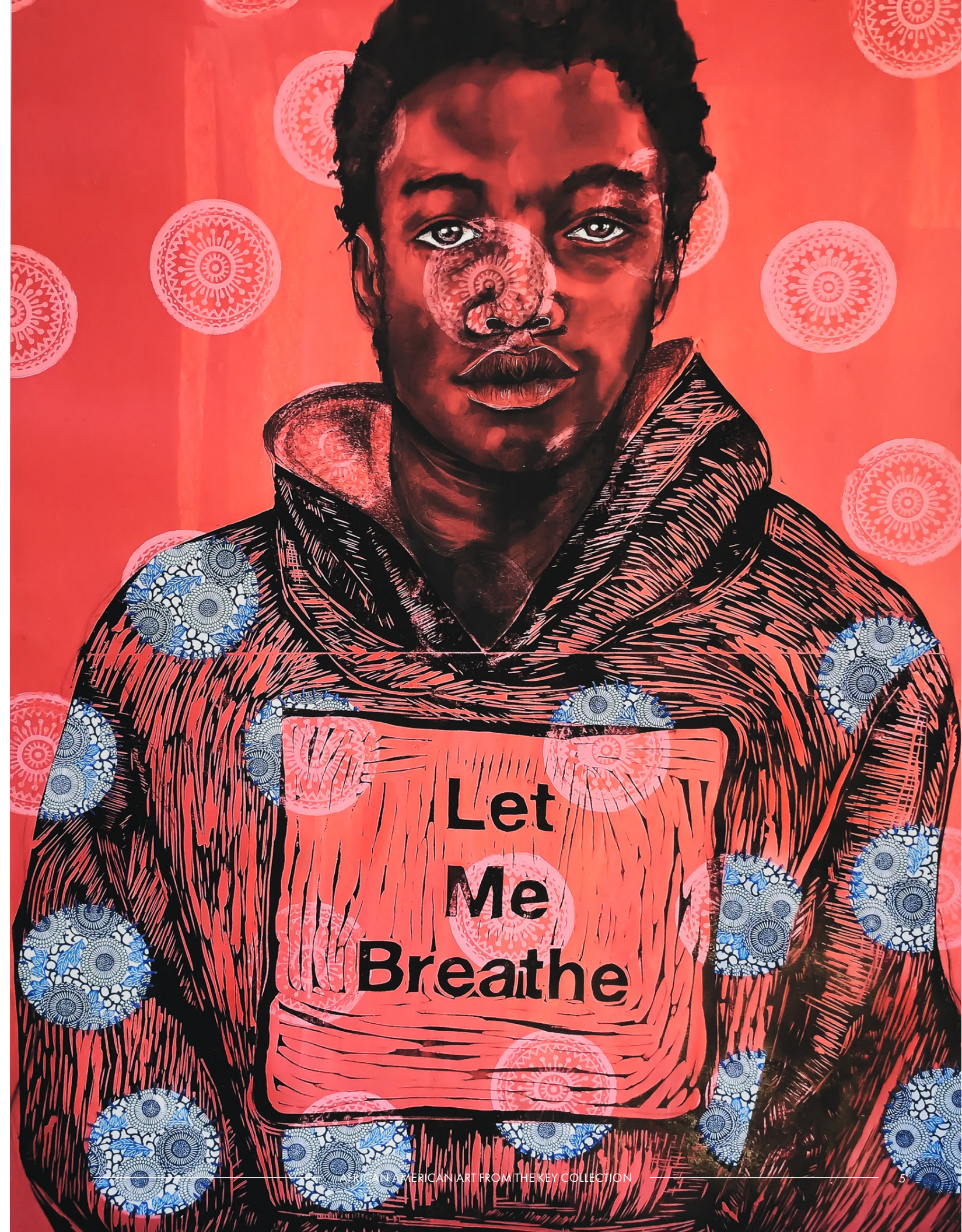
1. Reginald Gammon, *A Triptych for the Black Church (MLK and Mothers)*, 1965, Oil on board, 36" x 60", Courtesy of the Eric Key Collection, © 2022 Estate of Reginald Gammon / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY





Holding a number of roles throughout his career, Key is currently the director of the Arts Program at University of Maryland Global Campus. He previously served as the executive director of the Kansas African American Museum (Wichita), director of programs for the Black Academy of Arts and Letters, curator for the African American Museum in Dallas, and assistant curator of African American history at Old City Park, also in Dallas. All told, Key has curated more than 200 culturally diverse exhibitions, working with countless artists, curators, art activists, and directors. This vast experience, and the extensive network of friends and colleagues that it has fostered, directly inform Key's mastery as a collector and are the foundation of this dynamic, poignant collection of African American art. The roots of Key's approach to collecting reach back to his early childhood, as well as to his more recent reflections on the role and depictions of Black people in the visual arts.

2. Richmond Barthé, *Feral Benga*, 1986, Bronze, 19" x 4½" x 4½", Courtesy of the Eric Key Collection, © Richmond Barthé.
3. Delita Martin, *Let Me Breathe*, 2020, Relief Print, 36" x 24", Courtesy of the Eric Key Collection, © Delita Martin.





4. Jacob Lawrence, *Strategy*, 1999, Silkscreen (12/120), 18" x 28",
Courtesy of the Eric Key Collection, © 2022 The Jacob and
Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists
Rights Society (ARS), New York

Why aren't there any black people in the picture?

As a child, we did not have any art in the house that I can remember. There were only black-and-white photos of family members, aside from the image of Jesus and the poster of the "Last Supper," a depiction that hung in my grandmother, great grandmother, and great aunt's homes. They all had the same picture. "The Last Supper" image depicted Jesus as a White, blond-haired man with all White disciples. I remember looking at the image, wondering why couldn't Jesus be the same color as me? Why aren't there any Black people in the picture? I simply accepted the notion that Jesus and the disciples were White. It wasn't until later in high school and college that I began to seriously question the complexity of Jesus, the existence of Black people, and the notion that everything might not be as White as I was led to believe.

5. Margo Humphrey, *Fear Not, I Got You*, 2013, Color lithograph with gold leaf, 27" x 22", Courtesy of the Eric Key Collection, © Margo Humphrey.



Who am I?

People of color have asked similar questions time and again, in part because they are not simply questions of race but of personal identity. Speaking from the heart, Key tells us that: Collecting art by African American artists has its conceptual beginning early in my development as a child. It began with the question, "Who am I?" I would always ask this question to myself in high school and as a young adult. This question nagged at me for many years as I gained a better understanding of the world around me and the absence of people with skin color like mine in it. Or, better yet, the negativity about people of color. It was not until later that many of my questions would be answered, and it was the arts, art history, and the history of people of African descent that began to give shape to my question.



6. Percy Martin, *Three Bushwomen*, (date unrecorded), Watercolor on paper, 30" x 33", Courtesy of the Eric Key Collection, © Percy Martin.



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This questioning drove Key to a career in art, with the explicit goal of learning about, and helping, as many African American artists as he could. He wanted to showcase their works, preserve their stories, and (most importantly) play his own part in correcting history. This mission started with collecting—bringing the works of African American artists into his home, and living his life with them. In this way, Key's collection became an intensely personal story; but no less fascinating is the broader story it tells of the Black experience in America.

Enlisted to tell this story are some of the world's most recognizable contemporary Black artists: Sam Gilliam, Jacob Lawrence, Elizabeth Catlett, William Artis, Samella Lewis, and Renee Stout. However, Key's extensive collection casts its scope far beyond these names—familiar to most White audiences—to reach deep into the Black community and its (relatively) unsung heroes. Some of the artists it showcases are rising stars, while others—though still unfamiliar to mainstream audiences—have been integral to the evolution of Black art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Together, these artists work to dispel the many stereotypes and misunderstandings about African American art and people, replacing them with complex imagery and a vivid tapestry of personal narratives. As Key states, the works in his collection are an extension of himself, a Black man in a still mostly White art world; they are an extension of the country in which he lives and of the artists who created them. For Key, who has long used his resources as an arts administrator, curator, and collector to support Black artists professionally and personally, the works are tangible contributions—*Gateways*—for the ascent of African American artists.

7. Faheem Majeed, *Grandma Chair*, 2009, Paint, metal, and wood, 76" x 28" x 19½", Courtesy of the Eric Key Collection, © Faheem Majeed.
8. Preston Sampson, *Portrait*, 2000, Watercolor with collage paper, 18" x 12", Courtesy of the Eric Key Collection, © Preston Sampson.



Since the exhibition’s ultimate goal is to present a robust survey of African American art—as well as a glimpse into the personal stories of its artists and collector—it is not divided into strict thematic categories. However, in the process of selecting the works, some broad groupings emerged: namely sculpture, two-dimensional figurative work, and two-dimensional abstraction. The sculptural section ranges in size from the intimate to the monumental, and includes a number of figurative works in styles ranging from realistic to highly abstract. The two-dimensional figurative works are presented in a variety of media, and—as the figure and its accompanying issues of representation and identity have been so integral to Black art—they constitute the largest section of the exhibition. Given the sheer ubiquity of figurative work in Black art, abstraction and nonrepresentational art by Black artists are relatively underrepresented in the art world. Consequently, special attention has been given to ensure that this section includes a comparable number of works, demonstrating their unique strength and breadth of vision.

International Arts & Artists is extremely pleased to bring this exhibition, with its rich insights into African American art, to our partners. Gateways will tour for four years—until late 2027—and is now open for bookings.



9. Maya Freelon, *Balance*, 2017, Watercolor, 30" x 40", Courtesy of the Eric Key Collection, © Maya Freelon.

About the Lender & Curator

Born in 1957 in Smithfield, Virginia, Eric Key is an arts administrator, investor, and collector who—by his own admission—“can’t draw a straight line.” Currently director of the Arts Program at University of Maryland Global Campus, he came to UMGC in 2008 after serving for more than a decade as executive director of the Kansas African American Museum (Wichita). He also served as director of programs for the Black Academy of Arts and Letters, curator for the African American Museum Dallas, and assistant curator of African American history at Old City Park, all in Dallas, Texas. Over the course of his career, he has curated more than 200 culturally diverse exhibitions, working closely with countless artists, curators, art activists, and directors. For decades, he has expanded and sharpened his knowledge of the art field, particularly the pivotal contributions of African American artists. Desiring to support African American artists and to help preserve the Black experience in the Americas in art, Key began collecting African American art in the early ‘90s, simultaneously acquiring great and innovative artworks while supporting friends and the many communities of which he has been a part.

10. Floyd Coleman, *Colonial Wars and Things*, 1970-71, Acrylic on canvas, 61" x 61", Courtesy of the Eric Key Collection, © Floyd Coleman.



FRONT William "Bill" Taylor, *Christ*, 1961, Wood, 68" x 10" x 3½", Courtesy of the Eric Key Collection, © William "Bill" Taylor.

BACK Gordon Parks, *Grandchildren of Ella Watson, A Government Chairwoman*, 1942, photograph, 22" x 25" x 2", Courtesy of the Eric Key Collection, © Gordon Parks.

EXHIBITION SPECIFICATIONS

Number of Works
88 artworks

Requirements
Moderate Security;
2,500 - 3,500 square feet

Participation Fee
Please inquire

Publication
For more information contact
projectmanager@artsandartists.org

Shipping
IA&A makes all arrangements;
exhibitors pay outgoing shipping
costs within the contiguous US

Booking Period
12 weeks

Tour
Summer 2024 - Summer 2028

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