

USF Contemporary Art Museum
NEWS RELEASE
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USF Contemporary Art Museum Presents
STILL HERE:
The Griffith J. Davis Photographs
and Archives in Context
January 22 – March 6, 2021



Griffith J. Davis. Griff Davis reviews the script for Liberia's first promotional film "Pepperbird Land" with its narrator, emerging actor Sidney Poitier in Monrovia, Liberia, 1952. Griffith J. Davis Photographs and Archives.

(TAMPA, FL – December 15, 2020) The USF Contemporary Art Museum, part of the USF Institute for Research in Art in the College of The Arts, will present a new and unique exhibition entitled, ***Still Here: The Griffith J. Davis Photographs and Archives in Context***, on Friday, January 22, 2020 starting with a virtual Zoom-based reception at 6 pm. Griffith J. Davis (1923-1993) was an artist internationally acclaimed for "painting" memorable masterpieces. His preferred media for creating his outstanding imageries were the camera, the pen and typewriter rather than a paint brush and canvas. A pioneer international photographer, journalist, U.S. Senior Foreign Service Officer, and photo-documentarian, Mr. Davis' artistic and iconic photographs capture historical moments and figures, lifestyles, personalities and people across a spectrum of political, socio-economic and artistic sectors at the vortex of the Civil Rights Movement and the Independence Movement of Africa. His rarely seen 1939 to 1988 era photographic imagery of his groundbreaking life and photographic practice will be fully placed in context with thematically complementary contemporary artworks by artists Romare Bearden, Emory Douglas, Jacob Lawrence, Deana Lawson, Zanele Muholi, and Hank Willis Thomas.

The exhibition will be on view through March 6, 2021. Reservations will be required to visit USFCAM; masks and social distancing are required on campus. Check cam.usf.edu for reservation information and opening status. The exhibition will be available to view online at cam.usf.edu.

In keeping with the English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's definition of artists, poets, philosophers, writers and musicians as "the unacknowledged legislators of the world", the explosion of

expressions of art represented by photographs, collages, lithographs and digital prints from these artists brings additional layers of depth to the collective imagery displayed. **Romare Bearden** is an American artist, author, and songwriter, who worked with many types of media including cartoons, oils, and collages. **Emory Douglas** is hailed as a revolutionary graphic artist for using as inspiration his former membership as the Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party, to create iconography to represent black-American oppression.

Jacob Armstead Lawrence is an American painter known for his portrayal of African-American historical subjects and contemporary life especially in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. **Deana Lawson** is an American artist, educator and photographer whose

revolves primarily around issues of intimacy, family, and spirituality. **Zanele Muholi** is a South African artist and visual activist working in photography, video, and installation. **Hank Willis Thomas** is an American conceptual artist working primarily with themes related to identity, history, and popular culture. Thomas is the son of Deborah Willis, a contemporary African-American artist, photographer, curator of photography, who was a 2000 MacArthur Fellow. Ms. Willis considered Griff Davis to be one of her mentors.



Deana Lawson American, born 1979. *Binky & Tony Forever*, 2009. Pigmented inkjet print (Archival inkjet print), 37 × 43 1/4 in. (94 × 109.9 cm) Museum purchase, 2019, SN11654. Collection of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, the State Art Museum of Florida, Florida State University, Sarasota, Florida.

Combining his skills as photojournalist and filmmaker into his 35 year career as a diplomat specializing in international development communications for ultimately the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Liberia, Tunisia, Nigeria and across Africa, Mr. Davis was able to use his art forms to impact emerging and existing “legislators” and policymakers across continents while nurturing common ground between different cultures and mindsets. An Atlanta, Georgia native during the Jim Crow era, his internal lens informed his external eye in ways that enabled his perspective to influence the key influencers with whom he regularly rubbed elbows in that era. They included his professor, mentor, landlord and lifelong friend Langston Hughes; jazz legends Duke Ellington and Bud Powell; singer Lena Horne; actor Sidney Poitier; friend and Nobel Laureate Martin Luther King, Jr.; Liberia’s President William V.S. Tubman, Ethiopia’s Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie; Ghana’s Founding Father and first Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah and Tunisia’s Founding Father President Habib Bourguiba, President Dwight Eisenhower and Vice President Richard Nixon and, of course, the people and the artists of the countries in which he lived and served.

In the Tampa Bay area, Mr. Davis was awarded posthumously the Lifetime Achievement Impact Award by the Tampa Bay Businesses for Culture and the Arts at the organization’s 31st Annual Impact Awards (Virtual) Program on October 1, 2020. In addition, the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts (FMoPA) exhibited “Griff Davis- Langston Hughes, Letters and Photographs, 1947-1967: A Global Friendship” from January to August 2020.

Still Here: The Griffith J. Davis Photographs and Archives in Context is curated by Dorothy M. Davis, President of the Griffith J. Davis Photographs and Archives, Christian Viveros-Fauné, CAM Curator-at-Large, and Noel Smith, Deputy Director of CAM, and is organized by the USF Contemporary Art Museum.

The exhibition will open with a virtual, Zoom-based reception at 6pm on January 22, and will be on view through March 6, 2021.

The exhibition is supported by a USF Understanding and Addressing Blackness and Anti-Black Racism in Our Local, National, and International Communities Grant, Susana and Yann Weymouth, Mort and Sara Richter, the Stanton Storer Embrace the Arts Foundation, and the Florida Department of State.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Opening Celebration + Conversation with Dorothy M. Davis, Christian Viveros-Fauné, and Noel Smith

Friday, January 22, 2021 At 6pm Est, Online Via Zoom And Facebook Live (CAM.USF.EDU)

An Evening with Dorothy M. Davis; The Photography And Life Of Griffith J. Davis

Hosted By The Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library

Thursday, February 11, 2021 At 6:30pm Est, Online (HCPLC.org/Events)

Dorothy M. Davis, President of Griffith J. Davis Photographs and Archives, will present an illustrated talk focusing on the impact of the photography and legacy of her father Griffith J. Davis (1923-1993), pioneering Black photojournalist, filmmaker, and US Senior Foreign Service Officer. Plus: live Q&A! The online session will be moderated by Dr. Antoinette Jackson, chair of the USF Anthropology Department. This event is presented by the University of South Florida (USF) Contemporary Art Museum, in partnership with the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library (THPL).

Curators' Tour With Christian Viveros-Fauné And Noel Smith

Tuesday, February, 16, 2021 At 3pm Est, Online Via Zoom And Facebook Live (CAM.USF.EDU)

ABOUT USF CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM

The University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum (USFCAM) organizes and presents significant and investigative exhibitions of contemporary art from Florida, the United States, and around the world, including Africa, Europe, and Latin America. Exhibitions and educational programs are designed to introduce students, faculty, and the community to current cultural trends. USFCAM also publishes relevant catalogues, schedules critically important traveling exhibitions, and underwrites new projects by artists emerging on national and international fronts. USFCAM maintains the university's art collection, comprising more than 5,000 art works.

The USF Contemporary Art Museum is recognized by the State of Florida as a major cultural institution and receives funding through the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, the Florida Council on Arts and Culture, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The USF Contemporary Art Museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums.

TAMPA-HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library (THPL), with 27 locations and two mobile libraries, serves Hillsborough County and the City of Tampa. THPL promotes lifelong learning, an informed citizenry, individual intellectual freedom, enhanced quality of life and broadened horizons for all residents of Hillsborough County. For more information about the public library's free online programs for all ages, visit HCPLC.org/Events.



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