one who so dearly loves you, one whose love fills the
treasures of the heart, can not be purchased from me
the love of your own person. It made me sick in
the hospital. I trust nothing serious has happened,
but I am somewhat better than he has been.
My dear girl, while I am away, do not let yourself
be too hard, but if you do not remember that if
I fall that it is in the
cause of humanity that
I am attacks us for
the defense of the most
abused and helpless;
so in the solution of this
trite task the question
of our elevation, or our
degradation, our hap-
inesses or our miseries.
Would you wish me to
accept from such a strife?
I know that your heart
makes that it were not necessary
but I trust that your love of
the happiness of your race
and my race so convince you
to our separation which may
be forever?
Think of me often, surely;
but do not let your thoughts
bemoming, do not think of
me in pain, do not think of
me enduring hardships, do
not think of me grappling
with that from respect?
serious death! But think
of me as aiding in the
glorious work of humanity.
The SCAD Museum of Art presents an exhibition centered on the Frederick Douglass Family Archive from the Walter O. Evans Collection. This historic register of the Douglass family’s manuscripts, letters, newspaper clippings, and photographs is displayed in dialogue with artworks by modern and contemporary artists whose work reflects the aesthetic and political values espoused by this revolutionary leader.

For Douglass (1818–1895), an individual who was born into slavery and went on to become one of the most world-renowned social justice campaigners, the right to the imagination was the right to life. In his work as an orator, author, and fierce intellectual, the abolitionist believed that not only words but works of art were tools in the path for freedom. As a prolific creator and collector of autobiographies, essays, diaries, poems, photographs, paintings, drawings, and sculptures — many of which now reside in the Walter O. Evans Collection and are included in this exhibition — Douglass ultimately believed in art as a means to individual and collective liberation.

*Frederick Douglass: Embers of Freedom* is a dynamic exhibition that addresses critical subjects that shaped the life’s work of Douglass and continue to be at the forefront of today’s sociopolitical discourse. This project reveals the historic narrative of the Douglasses and their unwavering commitment to transatlantic abolitionism and radical reform, not only for African Americans but for society as a whole. Additionally, this exhibition offers an expanded definition of Douglass, as it considers him not only as a key figure for civil rights but also an advocate for women’s suffrage, one of the first proponents of photographic theory, and, perhaps most distinctively, as a family man.

Key issues examined within this exhibition include the value of family, representation and visibility, archival methodologies, the legacy of slavery, black resistance, and intergenerational struggle. The Douglass family’s archival materials have been brought into view alongside special commissions by artists Onyedika Chuke, TR Ericsson, Glyneisha Johnson, Le’Andra LeSeur (B.F.A., photography, 2014), and Charles Edward Williams (B.F.A., advertising, 2006), as well as master works by Jacob Lawrence and Charles White held within Walter O. Evans’ private collection, on loan to SCAD, and critical objects by some of the leading figures of contemporary art such as Lyle Ashton Harris, Titus Kaphar, LaToya Ruby Frazier, and Betye Saar. Together, this holistic grouping of artwork provides viewers with the opportunity to consider the past and present circumstances in which the ongoing fight for social justice has taken place. In this exhibition, there is hope that viewers will be galvanized by the monumental feats of this “First Family of African American History” to carry on the torch of activism.

**Artists featured:**
- Raphaël Barontini
- Kevin Beasley
- Onyedika Chuke
- Scott Covert
- Omar Victor Diop
- TR Ericsson
- LaToya Ruby Frazier
- Lyle Ashton Harris
- Lubaina Himid
- Glyneisha Johnson
- Titus Kaphar
- Martha Rosler
- Betye Saar
- James Van Der Zee
- Barbara Walker
- Gillian Wearing
- Charles White
- Charles Edward Williams
- Wilmer Wilson IV

Douglass-related projects *The Golden March* by Raphaël Barontini and *Frederick Douglass: Lessons of the Hour* by Isaac Julien are presented in the museum’s Jewel Boxes and Experimental Gallery, working in conversation with this exhibition.

*Frederick Douglass: Embers of Freedom* is curated by Humberto Moro, curator of SCAD exhibitions; Ben Tollefson, assistant curator of SCAD exhibitions; Ariella Wolens, assistant curator of SCAD exhibitions; Storm Janse Van Rensburg, former head curator of SCAD exhibitions; and Celeste-Marie Bernier, professor of black studies and personal chair in English literature at the University of Edinburgh.
ABOUT SCAD AND SCAD MUSEUM OF ART

Offering more degree programs and specializations than any other art and design university, SCAD is uniquely qualified to prepare talented students for creative professions. The SCAD Museum of Art, a resource for SCAD students and alumni during their academic careers and beyond, features emerging and established international artists through commissioned works and rotating exhibitions, and involves local communities with special initiatives of international scope.

SCAD Museum of Art educational materials engage K-12 audiences in activities that enhance understanding of art and design — investigations that reveal relevant personal, historical, and cultural connections while promoting cross-disciplinary links necessary for today’s innovative careers.

Recognizing the guides’ overall design excellence and ingenuity, the Southeastern Museums Conference as well as the American Alliance of Museum’s Museum Publications Design Competition have awarded SCAD curriculum guides first- and second-place prizes, a medal, and honorable mentions for four consecutive years.

For more information, visit scad.edu and scadmoa.org.


Educational standards are listed on pages 24–25.
Highlighted glossary terms are found on page 27.
Additional learning resources are located in the Curriculum Connections section on pages 30–31.
“...PICTURES MUST EXERT A POWERFUL, THOUGH SILENT, INFLUENCE UPON THE IDEAS AND SENTIMENT OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.”

- Frederick Douglass
Famed photographer Mathew Brady took this portrait of Douglass. Years earlier, Brady’s 1860 portrait of presidential candidate Abraham Lincoln proved so popular that it was widely credited with helping secure his election, further convincing Douglass of photography’s unique potential to shape public perception.
Activity 1

Frederick Douglass, famed African-American statesman, author, orator, and human rights activist, was born into slavery. Separated as an infant from his mother, Douglass was still a child when he was taken from his grandmother, who had raised him. He was then passed through a series of slaveholders, one of whom taught him the basics of literacy. Exposed for this and other acts of defiance, Douglass was sent to a brutal overseer, whose unrelenting beatings were intended to break his spirit. Instead, Douglass planned and carried out a courageous escape, found freedom, and joined the abolitionist movement. Bearing witness to the horrors of slavery in public forums, Douglass quickly earned a reputation as an eloquent speaker and then as a writer and publisher, launching his lifelong mission of civil rights advocacy.

Douglass holds the remarkable distinction of being the most photographed American of the 19th century. Photography’s democratic nature appealed to Douglass. Objective and visible to all through newspaper reproductions and cartes de visite, this relatively new medium provided convincing truths with the potential to challenge racist stereotypes.

Douglass was acutely aware of the influence of imagery. Reacting with indignation to caricatures of black people, he took steps to ensure that his portraits conveyed the gravitas of the causes for which he fought. Maintaining a somber expression and forgoing the popular use of props and decorative backdrops, Douglass’ consistent, dignified solemnity communicated both his steadfast position and the profound weight of his ongoing struggle to end racism.

“‘I WILL NOT BE REPRESENTED AS A FIXED FACT, A PIECE OF PUBLIC PROPERTY. INSTEAD, I WILL BE A WORK OF ART.’”

- Frederick Douglass

When Douglass refused to be a “fixed fact,” he asserted his right to self-determination. What does he mean by a “piece of public property,” and more significantly, why does he equate this with a fixed fact?

Douglass offers being a “work of art” as a contrasting alternative to a fixed fact. Based on your responses to the questions above, and combined with what you know about Douglass’ aesthetic and humanitarian values, list the characteristics of what he would define as a work of art.

Left: Stereographic copy of photographic print of Frederick Douglass by Mathew Brady, circa 1877. Collection of Walter and Linda Evans.
“I USED IMAGES TO TELL STORIES ABOUT MY PEOPLE AND ABOUT THEMES OF COURAGE.”

— Jacob Lawrence
Jacob Lawrence grew up under the guidance of Harlem Renaissance artists, who introduced him to black history and encouraged his distinctive approach. Lawrence was barely into his twenties when he began researching Douglass as the subject for one of his first series of works honoring African Americans. The Life of Frederick Douglass is composed of 32 painted panels, rendered in Lawrence’s bold graphic style, each accompanied by descriptive captions. Among these is the painting upon which this print is based. Lawrence shows Douglass at work on The North Star, the abolitionist paper Douglass founded.

“... JUSTICE MUST BE DONE, TRUTH MUST BE TOLD ... I WILL NOT BE SILENT.”

— Frederick Douglass
Charles White’s determination to become an artist was evident at an early age. He practiced diligently and analyzed artworks in museums. A studious reader, he spent hours in libraries and was troubled by the exclusion of black history from his schoolbooks. Like Lawrence, White was primarily concerned with portraying African American experiences and histories. Similar to both Douglass and Lawrence, he believed art communicated perspectives that held the power to influence humanity.

White drew the sketch to the right in preparation for his first public mural, the monumental *Five Great American Negroes*. In this work, White depicts Douglass standing at its center, his eyes fixed on the distance with an expression of resolve, while he supports a figure in the tattered clothing of a slave, a man who might easily represent Douglass’ younger self.

Jacob Lawrence and Charles White speak of their art as representing “courage” and “struggle.” How are these themes related? Share your thoughts and then explore the exhibition, looking for artworks and artifacts that express both courage and struggle. Compare your findings with friends. Relying on your observations, consider this question: Regarding the themes of courage and struggle within this exhibition, do you find evidence of change, continuity, or a combination of both?

*Charles White, Frederick Douglass*, pencil on paper, 1940. SCAD Museum of Art Permanent Collection; gift of Walter and Linda Evans.

“ART MUST BE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE STRUGGLE.”

— Charles White
"POETS, PROPHETS AND REFORMERS ARE ALL PICTURE-MAKERS—AND THIS ABILITY IS THE SECRET OF THEIR POWER AND OF THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS. THEY SEE WHAT OUGHT TO BE BY THE REFLECTION OF WHAT IS, AND ENDEAVOR TO REMOVE THE CONTRADICTION." 6

— Frederick Douglass
Titus Kaphar is fascinated by all kinds of history — his love of art history, for example, is evident in the classical realism he brings to his portraits. Kaphar is also interested in the history of individuals and the world at large, particularly how accounts of the past are “recorded, distorted, exploited, reimagined, and understood.” His work literally covers and uncovers the past, revealing what were narrow views, hidden events, and experiences.

Kaphar’s *The Jerome Project* originated with the artist’s online search for his estranged father. The results confronted Kaphar with 99 incarcerated men, all bearing his father’s name. He was struck by their similar pasts and by how many of them were black. *The Jerome Project* addresses the artist’s concerns regarding the criminalization of black men and youth, the fearful stereotyping that portrays them as threats, and their over-representation in prison populations.

These works make no assumptions regarding guilt or innocence. Instead, Kaphar asks the viewer to consider the lifelong impact of incarceration. The portraits are placed on a gold-leaf background, recalling a devotional painting, and prompting the viewer to contemplate forgiveness. Partially submerged in tar, they physically demonstrate the tenacious, sticky grasp of a criminal conviction.

— Titus Kaphar

“I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT IF WE DON’T AMEND HISTORY BY MAKING NEW IMAGES, WE WILL ALWAYS EXCLUDE THE HISTORICALLY MARGINALIZED IN OUR SOCIETY AS WELL AS IN OUR ART.”

— Titus Kaphar

“RATHER THAN MAKING PAINTINGS ABOUT SOMETHING, YOU MAKE PAINTINGS THAT REFLECT THAT THING.”

— Titus Kaphar

Examine the works on this page and observe how Kaphar’s materials and methods physically show the real-life effects of the issues he addresses. For instance, the tar acts the same as incarceration, adhering to the reputations of these men, obscuring what others see of them and effectively silencing them.

Consider Kaphar’s way of working. Collaborate with friends to select an issue, a concern, or worry that you would like to express. Investigate your topic and brainstorm ways to visually communicate that concern. Keep your criteria in mind: choosing and manipulating materials in ways that demonstrate influences and consequences related to your topic.

Titus Kaphar, Detail from The Jerome Project (My Loss), oil, gold leaf and tar on wood panel (4 panels) 2014. Collection of Tracey and Phillip Riese, New York.
“IT IS THE PICTURE OF LIFE CONTRASTED WITH THE FACT OF LIFE, THE IDEAL CONTRASTED WITH THE REAL, WHICH MAKES CRITICISM POSSIBLE ... THE WANT OF PROGRESS IS NOT FELT WHERE SUCH WANT IS NOT MADE VISIBLE...”

— Frederick Douglass
LaToya Ruby Frazier was 17 when she began documenting her family's life in Braddock, Pennsylvania. This once-thriving steel town disintegrated over the course of three generations, including those of her grandmother, her mother, and herself. **Deindustrialization** brought the loss of businesses, stable communities, and critical services such as medical care. Rising rates of poverty, crime, and addiction were accompanied by ill health related to environmental toxins left by long-gone industries. Frazier and her family became a part of a struggling populace, trapped in a rapid socioeconomic decline.

Frazier’s photographs recording this time include collaborative efforts with her grandmother and mother, creating images that exist on a line between social documentation and self-portraiture. Frazier speaks through her work “not as a curious or concerned outsider but as a vulnerable insider,” employing photography as an avenue for regaining her power of self-determination.
"... PRODUCING THE PORTRAITS WITH BOTH MY MOTHER AND GRANDMOTHER WAS A DETOX AND TRANSFORMATION ... EACH PHOTOGRAPH I MADE GOT ME CLOSER TO MY FUTURE SELF...”12

- LaToya Ruby Frazier

Revisit Douglass’ and Frazier’s quotes on this page and page 17. Douglass’ dignified approach to forging his own image appears opposed to Frazier’s, yet both are fundamentally committed to advocating for oppressed people. Collaborate with friends to create lists of descriptive words and phrases that explain both Douglass’ and Frazier’s approaches to photography. Use these lists to craft a statement that summarizes the differences and similarities in the way these two place photography in the service of advocacy.

“MY FAMILY DID NOT HAVE A FAMILY ALBUM. WE WEREN’T THAT KIND OF FAMILY. SO IN A WAY I BECAME THAT PERSON, BUT I WAS DOCUMENTING THE PICTURES THAT NO FAMILY WOULD WANT TO SHOW.”13

- LaToya Ruby Frazier

“ALL WISHES, ALL ASPIRATIONS, ALL HOPES, ALL FEARS, ALL DOUBTS, ALL DETERMINATIONS GROW STRONGER AND STRONGER PRECISELY IN PROPORTION AS THEY GET THEMSELVES EXPRESSED IN WORDS, FORMS, COLOURS, AND ACTION.”

— Frederick Douglass
Lyle Ashton Harris frequently includes family and friends within his work. In the large-scale color Polaroid on the facing page we see the artist, his mother, and brother. Behind them are the colors of the pan-African flag: red, black, and green.

Harris was close to his grandparents — his grandfather was a keen observer and devoted amateur photographer who captured over 10,000 images documenting the life of his family and community. His mother was a university professor who, for a time, raised her sons in the East African country of Tanzania. Harris and his brother, filmmaker Thomas Harris, are both committed to using visual arts as a tool for social change, and both identify as queer. Harris’ work addresses topics of community and belonging, and of identities based on diverse ethnicities and sexualities.

"... IT’S SOMETHING ABOUT ALL THE TRUTH AND VERACITY OF PHOTOGRAPHY ... THE IDEA OF THE DOCUMENT IS SOMETHING I FIND DEEPLY SUSTAINING ... ALSO ITS ABILITY TO REIMAGINE IDENTITY."15

— Lyle Ashton Harris

Harris acknowledges the contradictions in his description of what attracts him to photography — its potential to represent what is and what might be. Like Douglass, he is aware of both the authority of the visual and the influential power of visualization, or imagination.

"... THE CAMERA, IN THE SPACES I FOUND MYSELF IN, BECAME A TOOL OR A WEAPON OR A COMFORT OR CONTROL THAT HELPED ME NEGOTIATE SPACE."16

— Lyle Ashton Harris

Consider Harris’ reflections regarding the camera as tool, weapon, comfort, and control. Brainstorm with friends, identifying ways an artist could use a camera for these purposes. Share your thoughts on how these motivations reveal themselves in Harris’ photographs and in work throughout the exhibition. Choose one or more examples and write a brief statement that describes and supports your observations.
EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

College, Career, and Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards


D2.His.2.6-8.  Classify series of historical events and developments as examples of change and/or continuity.
D2.His.2.9-12. Analyze change and continuity in historical eras.
D2.His.9.6-8.  Classify the kinds of historical sources used in a secondary interpretation.
D2.His.9.9-12. Analyze the relationship between historical sources and the secondary interpretations made from them.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-8.1  Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-12.1  Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
National Core Arts Standards

Creating 1.2  **Anchor:** Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

6: Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.
7: Develop criteria to guide making a work of art or design to meet an identified goal.
8: Collaboratively shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present-day life using a contemporary practice of art and design.

**HSI:** Shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present-day life using a contemporary practice of art or design.

**HSII:** Choose from a range of materials and methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices to plan works of art and design.

**HSIII:** Choose from a range of materials and methods of traditional and contemporary artistic practices, following or breaking established conventions, to plan the making of multiple works of art and design based on a theme, idea, or concept.

Responding 7.2  **Anchor:** Perceive and analyze artistic work.

6: Analyze ways that visual components and cultural associations suggested by images influence ideas, emotions, and actions.
7: Analyze multiple ways that images influence specific audiences.
8: Compare and contrast contexts and media in which viewers encounter images that influence ideas, emotions, and actions.

**HSI:** Analyze how one's understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery.

**HSII:** Evaluate the effectiveness of an image or images to influence ideas, feelings, and behaviors of specific audiences.

**HSIII:** Determine the commonalities within a group of artists or visual images attributed to a particular type of art, timeframe, or culture.

Responding 8.1  **Anchor:** Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

**HSI:** Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.

**HSII:** Identify types of contextual information useful in the process of constructing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works.

**HSIII:** Analyze differing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works in order to select and defend a plausible critical analysis.

Connecting 11.1  **Anchor:** Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

6: Analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses.
7: Analyze how response to art is influenced by understanding the time and place in which it was created, the available resources, and cultural uses.
8: Distinguish different ways art is used to represent, establish, reinforce, and reflect group identity.

**HSII:** Compare uses of art in a variety of societal, cultural, and historical contexts and make connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts.
carte de visite n. A mid-19th-century social convention resembling today’s business cards, a carte de visite was left at the home of an acquaintance or friend to let the receiver know that a visit had been attempted in their absence. As photographic reproduction became more economical, cartes de visite evolved to include portraits. Prized as collectibles, they eventually expanded to include images of celebrities.

deindustrialization n. The economic and social changes that follow the decline of a region’s primary industries, such as mining, automotive manufacturing, steelmaking, or chemical processing.

devotional painting n. A devotion refers to a prayer or religious observance. Often featuring gilded backgrounds and depicting holy figures, Christian devotional paintings serve as a focus for worship.

gravitas n. A dignified formality in bearing or appearance.

Harlem Renaissance A period from the 1920s to 1930s when the Harlem neighborhood of New York City became the cultural center for African American achievements in art, dance, literature, and music.

Mathew Brady (1823–1896) A popular portrait photographer turned documentarian, Brady and his staff are best known for their images of Civil War battlefields.

pan-African adj. Of or relating to a movement to support the bonds between worldwide peoples of African descent.

CITATIONS


14 Douglass, supra note 6


16 Ibid.
CONNECTIONS

Savannahian Dr. Walter O. Evans’ collection of African American art includes the documents and photography that inspired this exhibition. Learn about these works and how Dr. Evans became a collector.
nga.gov/exhibitions/2019/frederick-douglass-walter-evans.html
traditionalhome.com/lifestyle/antiques-collecting/collection-eye-art

In 1883 Harper’s Weekly featured Douglass as the cover story. View the original article and the accompanying portrait.
thelionofanacostia.wordpress.com/tag/harpers-weekly

View the series of 32 tempera-on-hardboard panels belonging to Jacob Lawrence’s “The Life of Frederick Douglass.”
jacobandgwenlawrence.org/gallery.php?page=16

Read about Charles White’s artistic career and view the image of Douglass included in Five Great American Negros.
altaonline.com/muscle-soul-and-vision

Watch Titus Kaphar deliver the TED Talk, “Can Art Amend History?”
ted.com/talks/titus_kaphar_can_art_amend_history

Explore LaToya Frazier’s recent work and projects.
latoyarubyfrazier.com

This trailer for Through a Lens Darkly: Black Photographers and the Emergence of a People includes the work of Lyle Ashton Harris.
pbs.org/independentlens/videos/family-photo-albums
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Installation view, Frederick Douglass: Embers of Freedom.
SCAD: The University for Creative Careers

The Savannah College of Art and Design is a private, nonprofit, accredited university conferring bachelor’s and master’s degrees at distinctive locations and online to prepare talented students for professional careers. SCAD offers more than 100 academic degree programs in more than 40 majors across its locations in Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia; Hong Kong; Lacoste, France; and online through SCAD eLearning.

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