



Kenturah Davis

## About the Artist and the Exhibition

Kenturah Davis' art oscillates between portraiture and design. Using text as a point of departure, she explores language and how it shapes our understanding of the world and ourselves, creating drawings, textiles, sculptures, and performances. Commissioned by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority to produce large-scale, site-specific work to be permanently installed on the new Crenshaw/LAX Line, Davis has exhibited in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America. A graduate of Yale School of Art, Davis is a 2020 Artist-in-Residence at Surf Point Foundation in York, Maine.

*Everything that Cannot Be Known* reflects Davis' exhaustive research on penmanship and mark-making in relation to the representation of black bodies. Featuring more than 20 works completed since 2017, the figures in the exhibition appear blurred or doubled, emphasizing the impossibility of portraying the complexities of one subject and the intangibility of personal and collective identities. Curated by Humberto Moro, adjunct curator for SCAD exhibitions, *Everything that Cannot Be Known* is presented as part of SCAD deFINE ART 2020, the university's annual program of commissions, exhibitions, lectures, and performances held Feb. 18–20 in Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia.

## 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.

For more information, visit [scad.edu](https://scad.edu) and [scadmoa.org](https://scadmoa.org).

### SCAD: The University for Creative Careers

The Savannah College of Art and Design is a private, nonprofit, accredited university, offering more than 100 academic degree programs in more than 40 majors across its locations in Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia; Lacoste, France; and online via SCAD eLearning.

For more information, visit [scad.edu](https://scad.edu).

Cover image: **Kenturah Davis**, *The Poetics of a Pivot*, oil paint applied with rubber stamp letters and graphite grid on embossed Mohachi paper, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Brown Los Angeles, collection of Fredericka and David Middleton.

SCAD  
MUSEUM OF ART

601 Turner Blvd.  
Savannah, Georgia  
912.525.7191  
[scadmoa.org](https://scadmoa.org)

SCAD de:FINEART



The concealed and layered lettering and blurred imagery of Kenturah Davis’ portraits serve as metaphors for social understanding. Davis compares encounters with her work to people’s interactions with each other. Individuals often reach conclusions based upon visible traits, without accessing hidden histories and unseen qualities.

Davis wants viewers to consciously consider how they arrive at conclusions. Her works emphasize that inaccessible elements within a person exist meaningfully, regardless if understood by others.



“

I like the idea of leaving hints that there’s something underneath the surface ...  
something that you don’t quite have access to, because that’s the nature of our interactions ...

”<sup>1</sup>



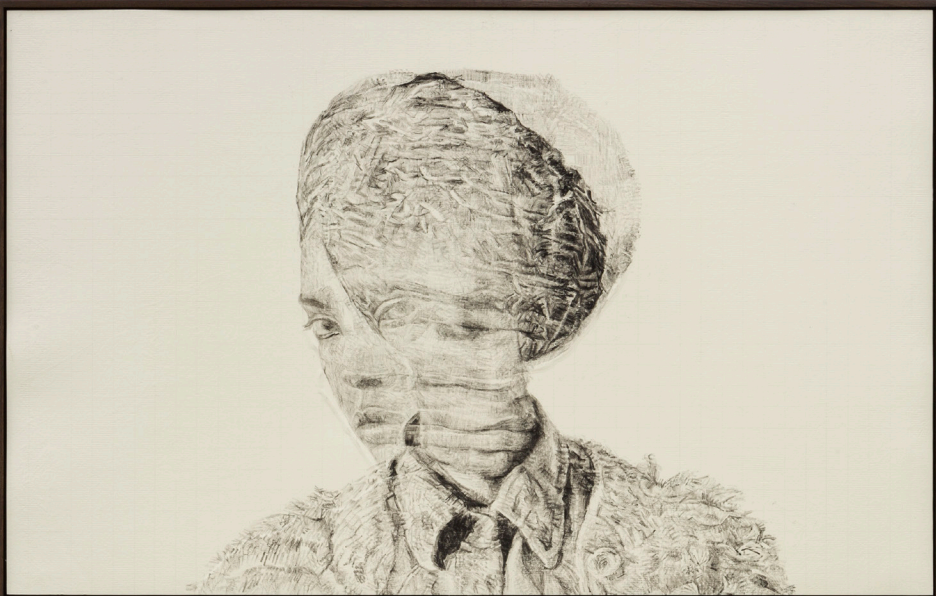
From top to bottom: **Kenturah Davis**, *Everything that Cannot Be Known*, oil paint applied with rubber stamp letters and glass beads on debossed Igarashi Kozo paper, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Brown Los Angeles, Rubell Collection, Miami; **Kenturah Davis**, detail, *Everything that Cannot Be Known*.

“

I chose a way of creating work that’s intricate, and while you don’t feel the intricacy from a distance,  
when you get up close, the components start to pop out.

”<sup>2</sup>

Explore Davis’ exhibition. With friends, choose a portrait to examine in depth. Refer to the list of terms below and discuss how individual elements within this work demonstrate Davis’ intent.



**Kenturah Davis**, *Infinite Halves*, handwritten text of graphite on paper with charcoal and oil-based ink, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Brown Los Angeles.

line

value

color

texture

movement

rhythm

balance

scale

Davis merges image and language in her two-dimensional works and woven sculptural pieces. The connection between these different mediums, or ways of creating, is revealed by the Latin root for “text:” *texere*, to weave. To write or speak is to interweave words in structured patterns to communicate complex thoughts and ideas.

What qualities do the arts share with language? Compare an arts encounter with a conversation. Consider the expressive role of the arts and the part curiosity and attentiveness plays in successful understandings. Collect responses and examples from friends. Then, record and organize differing viewpoints into a chart or diagram.

Woven works require frames to support their construction. Likewise, language and other forms of communication rely on context to support understanding and interpretation. Context refers to surrounding elements that provide additional insight on a subject and is often referred to as a frame.

How has contextual information affected your experience of Davis’ work?

“

The drawings embody an interest I have  
in thinking about our relationship with language.

”<sup>3</sup>



**Kenturah Davis**, *Limen II*, hand-imprinted text, pencil rubbing on Kozo paper, handmade shifu (paper weaving) drawing, in artist frame, 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Brown Los Angeles.

<sup>1</sup> Davis, K. [NXTHVN]. (2019, Dec. 20). *NXTHVN Studio Visit with Kenturah Davis* [Video]. Retrieved from youtube.com/watch?v=IG2xPXMJRn0.

<sup>2</sup> Jone, L. E., and Badal, K. P. (2019, Nov. 22). *Four Philanthropic Pairs Making it Happen in L.A.*. Retrieved from mlangeleno.com/four-philanthropic-pairs-making-it-happen-in-los-angeles.

<sup>3</sup> Davis, K. *supra*, note 1.