

News Release | Contact: Nils Nadeau, Head of Publishing and Communications | (603) 646-2095 | nils.nadeau@dartmouth.edu

Hood Museum of Art Brings the Art of the Civil Rights Era to Dartmouth College



Hanover, N.H.—July 31, 2014—Fifty years ago, the Congress of the United States passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The bill came before the U.S. Senate in February 1964, survived a fifty-four-day filibuster, and was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on July 2. The struggle for racial equality had been waged for decades, and it continued to be fought throughout the 1960s. Visual artists mounted their own insurgency, acting on their commitment to the belief that progress could be

won by changing the way people see things. In observance of the fiftieth anniversary of this momentous legislation, *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties* presents more than one hundred works by sixty-six artists who merged their art and their political activism on behalf of civil rights. The exhibition, organized by the Brooklyn Museum, is among the few to explore how painting, sculpture, graphic art, and photography not only responded to the political and social turmoil of the era but also helped to influence its direction. *Witness* will be on view at the Hood from August 30 through December 14, 2014, and will be accompanied by lectures and other museum programming, a fully illustrated catalogue, and a smartphone-based audio tour.

“This ambitious exhibition is an opportunity for everyone to encounter moving works of art and a spectacular array of innovative programs that emerge directly from the Hood’s teaching mission.” said Michael Taylor, Director of the Hood Museum of Art. “Visitors will be able to explore, through the power of the extraordinary works of art on display, the many ways that people make a difference to themselves, their communities, and the world by taking action.”

No clear and contemporary road map existed for political activism in the arts at the outset of the 1960s. The established artists of the Cold War generation—primarily abstractionists who saw their work as profoundly subjective and self-contained—rejected the validity of art that was socially or politically activist. A significant number of artists, driven by their inseparable convictions and commitment to their work, nevertheless tapped a wide array of aesthetic approaches to produce art in support of the cause of racial equality. The works on view in *Witness* encompass gestural abstraction, pop aesthetics, collage, assemblage, photography, minimalism, and collaborative printmaking. The artists who created them sought to envision, or move American culture closer to, a civil society. They generated a multiplicity of dialogues about systemic racism and the disenfranchisement of African Americans, and they visualized affirmations of full citizenship, black identity, empowerment, and communal creativity.

Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties

HOOD
MUSEUM OF ART
www.hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu

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Highlights of *Witness* include Jacob Lawrence's response to the controversy surrounding school desegregation in the South with his *Soldiers and Students*, one of several compositions by the artist to focus on demonstrations and violence; Barkley Hendricks's *Lawdy Mama*, which confers the awe and reverence once accorded Christian altarpieces on the figure of a beautiful woman crowned with a large, halo-like Afro; AfriCOBRA co-founder Jae Jarrell's *Urban Wall Suit*, a fabric suit inspired by activist murals and urban graffiti that anticipates the current confluence of fashion and art; and Joe Overstreet's *The New Jemima*, which reclaims a negative stereotype in bold fashion. Photographers represented in the exhibition, including Richard Avedon, Bruce Davidson, Roy DeCarava, Gordon Parks, and Moneta Sleet Jr., captured the events of the civil rights movement as both documentarians and activists, often altering public opinion with their images in newspapers and magazines such as *Ebony* and *Life*.

Among the other artists featured in the exhibition are Norman Rockwell, Charles White, Faith Ringgold, May Stevens, James Rosenquist, Barbara Chase-Riboud, Elizabeth Catlett, Mark di Suvero, Sam Gilliam, Leon Polk Smith, Mel Edwards, Virginia Jaramillo, Philip Guston, David Hammons, Betye Saar, and Jeff Donaldson. Also represented in the exhibition are works by Charles Alston, Merton Simpson, Norman Lewis, and Romare Bearden, all members of Spiral, a group of New York artists who collectively explored how their practices could engage with the struggle for civil rights.

Witness represents an effort to recover a vital aspect of American art of the 1960s that has long been marginalized or ignored. While evoking the turbulence of their time, these works remain resonant for our increasingly complex society and for contemporary cultural activism in pursuit of social justice.

Don't miss these *Witness* events! On October 15 in the Hood Auditorium, activist-artists Jae Jarrell and Wadsworth Jarrell will engage in conversation with Rebecca Zorach, Professor of Art History at the University of Chicago and specialist on the artist collective AfriCOBRA. On October 24 and 25, join the exhibition's curators Kellie Jones and Terry Carbone for exhibition celebration events that include a lecture by Jones, a reception featuring live music, and an exhibition tour with Carbone. Full details for these events, and many others, are on the Hood's website.

Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties is curated by Teresa A. Carbone, Andrew W. Mellon Curator of American Art, Brooklyn Museum, and Kellie Jones, Associate Professor in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University. *It was organized by the Brooklyn Museum and made possible by the Ford Foundation. Its presentation at the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, was generously supported by Claire Foerster and Daniel S. Bernstein, Class of 1987, Kate and Yaz Krehbiel, Class of 1991, Thayer 1992, and the Leon C. 1927, Charles L. 1955, and Andrew J. 1984 Greenebaum Fund.*

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About the Hood Museum of Art

The mission of the Hood Museum of Art, as a teaching museum, is to create an ideal learning environment that fosters transformative encounters with works of art. This dynamic educational and cultural facility houses one of the oldest and largest college collections in the country, with more than 70,000 objects acquired since 1772. Among its most important works are six Assyrian stone reliefs that date from around 900 BCE. The collection also presents art from other ancient cultures, the Americas, Europe, Africa, Papua New Guinea, and many more regions of the world. The Hood seeks to inspire and educate through direct engagement with original works of art and offers access to the rich diversity of its collections through ongoing highlights displays, special exhibitions, an online collections database, and a wide array of programs and events.

About Dartmouth

Founded in 1769, Dartmouth is a member of the Ivy League and consistently ranks among the world's greatest colleges and universities. Dartmouth has forged a singular identity for combining its deep commitment to outstanding undergraduate liberal arts and graduate and professional education with distinguished research and scholarship in the arts and sciences and its three leading professional schools—the Geisel School of Medicine, Thayer School of Engineering, and the Tuck School of Business.

Media Contacts:

Hood Museum of Art

Nils Nadeau: (603) 646-2095 • nils.nadeau@dartmouth.edu

Dartmouth College Office of Public Affairs

(603) 646-3661 • office.of.public.affairs@dartmouth.edu

Image caption: Jacob Lawrence, *Soldiers and Students*, 1962, opaque watercolor over graphite on wove paper. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College: Bequest of Jay R. Wolf, Class of 1951; W.976.187. © 2014 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York