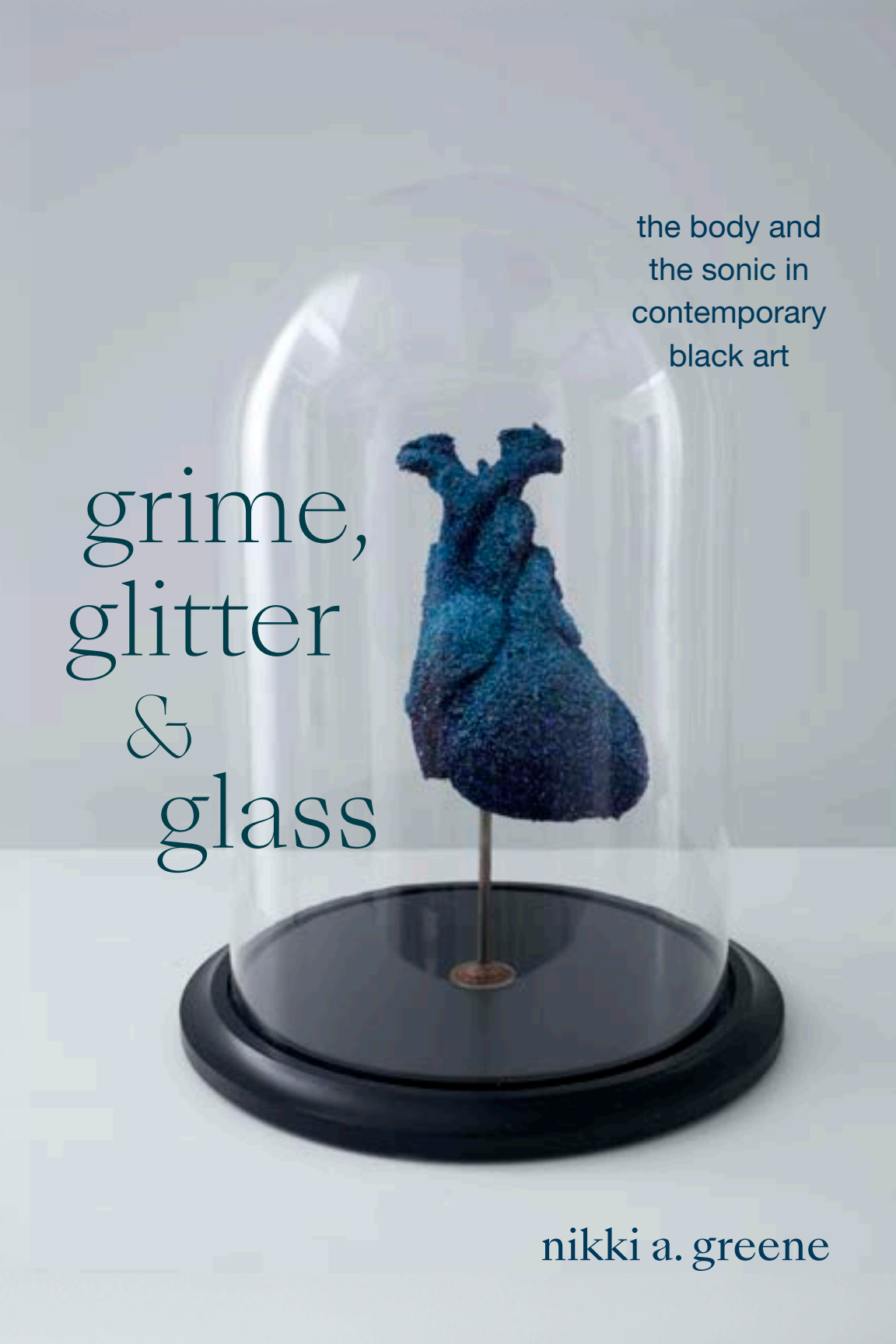
grime, glitter & glass

the body and the sonic in contemporary black art



nikki a. greene

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BUY

Renée Stout, *Thinking Room*, 2005. Installation view of the exhibition *Fragments of a Secret Life*, Hemphill Fine Arts, Washington, DC. Courtesy of the artist / **HEMPHILL** Artworks.

The Visual Arts of Africa and Its Diasporas
A series edited by Kellie Jones and Steven Nelson

the body and the sonic in
contemporary black art

grime, glitter & glass

nikki a. greene

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In dedication to the
enduring love of my parents

Mary A. Mayhew
(1945–2021)

&

Nathaniel W. Alexander
(1939–2022)

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prelude

the cadences of black art

The first time I witnessed someone making music by reading sheet music propped up on the piano, I believed that I would one day translate those cryptic symbols myself with the violin. In the end, I attended only two, maybe three, lessons in all. My parents could not afford more. My mother confessed in 2020 that I did not continue playing because she felt too ashamed to ask for financial assistance. This happened in other areas where I showed promise, like when I wanted to join a swim team and keep up with voice instruction. When I began to get into the rhythm of each opportunity, literally and figuratively, I stopped: the proper positioning of my fingers on the strings to elicit the correct sound on an instrument at age six, the beautiful coordination of the timing of my breath with the rotation of my limbs within the warm city pool waters at age eight, or the repetitive tonal exercises that required pushing air from my diaphragm to form fuller soprano phrases at age eleven. Singing persisted into my adult life thanks to my start in school choruses and church choirs. My voice is always already free.

My passion for art history initially stemmed from an appreciation of the Newark Museum of Art in New Jersey. According to my mother, everything about museums fascinated me: the cold marble floors, the dazzling framed color, the curious-faced visitors, and even the hushed atmosphere. John Cotton Dana created spaces for art in 1909 while serving as the director of the Newark Public Library. Based on the principles of accessibility of the arts and

sciences, Dana offered open stacks of books and rooms of art and artifacts for all. He became the founder and director of the official Newark Museum in 1913. He oversaw the construction of the building just yards away from the library in 1925. Dana radically envisioned the art institution as a form of "entertainment" in the downtown center of the booming industrial city of Newark, with nearby bustling factories, growing numbers of immigrant communities, and new shopping centers. Regardless of whether someone arrived to the museum as a factory worker or corporate magnate, the museum did not charge an entry fee.[1]

By the late 1970s and 1980s, when I began visiting with my mother and brother, the museum's mission remained consistent regarding user-friendliness and entertainment value. Accessibility meant affordability *and* quality. The museum amused us through not only art exhibitions but also small live-animal displays, a premier planetarium, and, most significantly for me, live concerts. I learned early on through the multisensorial and intellectual opportunities I sought in the Newark Museum of Art (and the Newark Public Library next door) that I could find my flow regardless of financial resources—and that flow had no limits.

Whatever the duration of my chances to play an instrument or to swim on a team or to practice singing privately, I discovered the patience required to establish a style and the experimentation needed to discover my own approach to finding rhythms in writing as an art historian. I understand clearly now the value of my voice in speech and in writing through the pacing of my movements ("verses" as chapters), mindful breathing (a curated selection of art and artists), and the repetition of refrains (careful and steady formal and sonic analysis) until I establish my flow.

Now, as a pseudomusician, I compose an original score based on my humble Newark origins. In writing this opus, I make audible and visible—for myself and for readers—the confidence of my voice in writing about art history, the Black body, and the sonic. Through my voice, I am both seen and heard. As I write of "visual aesthetic musicality" within these pages, I invite readers to follow my remix of the history of art, since I play new chords within a discipline that has traditionally not included poor Black girls like me.

Writing as Collage

How is it that the main character in Ralph Ellison's literary masterpiece *Invisible Man* listens to jazz and finds in Louis Armstrong's music the same types of "breaks" and moods that are found in that of pianist Earl Hines?[2] He

speaks of music as being articulated and understood from the point of view of one who is invisible. A basis for Ellison's characterization of invisibility stems from the music of "black folk," using W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* as a subtext.[3] The protagonist introduces this idea at the beginning of the novel by remarking on the sensibilities of Louis Armstrong:

> Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible. I think it must be because he's unaware that he *is* invisible. And my own grasp of invisibility aids me to understand his music. . . . Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around. That's what you hear vaguely in Louis's music.[4]

Therein lies the phenomenological turn between the aesthetic complexity of Armstrong's music and the potential potency of Black art, that is, art by artists of African descent, especially in the United States and, more broadly, the Americas and Europe. Ellison speaks of the breaking down and revision of rhythm as an articulation and liberation of the spirit of Black people, or even the freeing of the human spirit.[5] Only in recognition of his own invisibility does Ellison's protagonist notice the expression of invisibility in Armstrong's music.

The syncopation that Armstrong incorporates into his songs is what made Louis Armstrong who he was. Moreover, as music historian Ted Gioia has explained in *The History of Jazz*, "Armstrong stokes the fire merely by repeating—with variations in length, placement, and intensity—a single note."[6] The notes, especially within an improvisational phrase, sometimes move ahead of or behind the anticipated rhythm within a jazz tune. A musician's improvisational skill, therefore, reflects how they would "slip into the breaks and look around."[7] Armstrong had a remarkable ability to play on the "breaks." His "looking around" was not prescribed or contrived. The audience (and his band members, for that matter) did not know exactly what direction Armstrong's playing would take, or what he would see in those breaks, as "he, more than anyone else, showed the way to a more complex and sophisticated conception of the jazz solo, a conception that would change the music forever."[8] Improvisation makes apparent what *was* invisible before, *because there was no space for it*. What Armstrong achieves with music, Ellison carries out in prose and, as I argue throughout this book, artists Renée

Stout, Radcliffe Bailey, and María Magdalena Campos-Pons accomplish within their dynamic works of art.

For many years, I studied how Romare Bearden transformed the modern technique of western European and American collage and photomontage in his *Projections* photomontage series of the 1960s. The structure of this book reflects the influence of his selection process and his thoughtful juxtaposition of images.[9] By transporting masked faces cut from the cover of a book about African masks into American urban or southern landscapes, for example, Bearden created a decidedly idiosyncratic visual expression of Black identity using the compositional musical language of jazz.[10] Bearden's way of borrowing the syntax and structures of jazz, wherein he sought to represent and, ultimately, to unify fragments of the Black American experience, informs my own goal of amalgamating three artists into a coherent cadence of Black expression. Literary scholar Robert O'Meally arrived at the conclusion that "the jazz cadence of American culture" resides in the "process of American artistic exchange—in the intricate, shape-shifting equation that is the twentieth-century American experiment in culture—the factor of jazz music recurs over and over and over again: jazz dance, jazz poetry, jazz painting, jazz film, and more. Jazz as metaphor, jazz as model, jazz as relentlessly powerful cultural influence, jazz as cross-disciplinary beat or *cadence*."[11]

One of my arguments about Bearden's approach has to do with the physicality of collage methods—cutting, pasting, arranging, and rearranging in order to come up with a visually distinctive and multilayered work. Bearden's cadence, his conclusion from his "recognizable melodic formula, harmonic progression or dissonance resolution," could be found in his collages and his process:[12] "I build my faces, for example, from parts of African masks, animal eyes, marbles, [and] mossy vegetation. . . . I then have my small original works enlarged so the mosaic like jointings will not be so apparent, after which I finish the larger painting. I have found when some detail, such as a hand or eye, is taken out of its original context and is fractured and integrated into a different space and form configuration it acquires a plastic quality it did not have in the photograph."[13] I, too, in writing this book (and other publications), created a physical collage: sticky notes of all sizes and colors with notes written in red, black, blue, purple, green, or pink; pages of text scattered across the floor; digital images printed on recycled office paper and taped to sliding glass doors, which blocked out scenes from my yard. I moved the texts and images around until I could make sense of their order and cogency toward the larger goal: How do the rhythms of the works represented herein

harmonize with my own sensibilities toward image and sound? I had to extemporize my writing flow. I had to improvise.

Jazz improvisation presents a number of challenges to artistic expression: learning how to start and stop solos, how to conceive and perform patterns in time, and how to gain mastery over vocabulary and other sources required for any given musical composition. In what ethnomusicologist Paul F. Berliner calls "developmental breakthroughs," arduous practice pays off; musicians "discover that they have acquired the control to manipulate phrases accurately in tempo in relation to a progression's changing features."[14] The structural and performative elements in Bearden's photomontages are analogous to the rhythmic dexterity found in jazz improvisation. Bearden's precise indexing of process provides either a main or subsidiary framework for all of his subject matters, from music to family life, from urbanscapes to religious figures: "Oh, yes. I studied the modernists, and then I tried, in my own way, to relate modernism to the whole thing that was happening in the South . . . I studied a kind of spacing in my painting by listening to the music of Earl Hines. Going *da, da, da, da, da* would drive us crazy. I always think of a work as making a melody or the spacing of Earl Hines."[15] Hines's ability to improvise in the breaks within a measure comes from his awareness of the nodes in time and syncopation. These qualities drew Bearden to the pianist.

During the 1950s, Bearden composed jazz music himself. He published a number of songs with Larry Douglas and Fred Norman. About twenty of the songs were recorded, and he became a member of the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers in 1954. One song, a beguine called "Seabreeze" (which Seagram's used to promote a gin and tonic of the same name), became a hit in the mid-1950s.[16] His knowledge of music composition and his exposure to Hines, who was known for his innovations with octave progressions, further enhanced Bearden's ability to maneuver images within his own work. Bearden's additional understanding of Pablo Picasso's and Georges Braque's painted cubism reflects Bearden's adaptation of jazz rhythms to visual composition. Bearden understood the doubleness of his debt:

> Finally, I was able to block out the melody [played by Earl Hines] and concentrate on the silences between the notes. I found that this was very helpful to me in the transmutation of sound into colors and the placement of objects in my paintings and collages. I could have studied this integration and spacing in Greek vase painting, among many examples, but with Earl Hines, I ingested it within my own background. Jazz has shown me

> the ways of achieving artistic structures that are personal to me; but it also provides me continuing finger-snapping, head-shaking enjoyment of this unique, wonderful music.[17]

Jazz was Bearden's key to the visual manipulation of what he'd already learned from places like the Savoy Ballroom, the Museum of Modern Art, and Stuart Davis's studio.

In 1964 Bearden composed several photomontages, and then, on the recommendation of Reginald Gammon, his friend and fellow member of the Black artists' group Spiral, he enlarged five or six photomontages using the photographic process of making a photostat.[18] Arne Ekstrom, Bearden's dealer, suggested that Bearden create twenty more during the summer of 1964 to be ready for exhibition at his gallery. *Projections* was the title given to the collection of works, not only because of the method of enlarging the photomontages, but also because of the compositions' photographic and documentary quality.[19] In the case of *Pittsburgh Memory* (figure I.1), the enlargement of the double portrait, especially in the figure on the left, allows for a greater luminosity, magnifying the glistening parts of his dark skin. The two pairs of eyes gaze out much more directly and intensely at the viewer at this larger scale. While the built-up nature of the collage in the original photomontage disappears in the photostat, and the textures of the various mounted photographic papers are lost, the unified surface tones down the fragmentation of the faces, and the collage elements coexist more cohesively. Though there is a loss of texture, of the direct physical relationship to the evidence of fibers, tears, and glue, the photostat nevertheless retains its meaning and effect. The photographic reproduction is its own index, which points to the textures therein.

The books on the shelves at the Romare Bearden Foundation remain with their cutouts, tears, and bookmarks, as indices of Bearden's physical presence.[20] Bearden relied on a great variety of sources from which to select images. Art historian Richard Shiff makes clear that "the index" operates through the physicality of the hand, and at times the body, which asserts itself on the surface of the artwork in order to be performed.[21] What the facture of early modernist painters, especially Paul Cézanne, suggested to the viewer was the combined interest in and attention to formalism and primitive expressionism. Instead of eliminating the hand of the artist, as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres thought should be done, they deliberately and indexically demonstrated the hand's role in the creation of place within the surface, in the forms taken by the paintbrush, as it was directed by the pressure and

P.1 Romare Bearden, *Pittsburgh Memory*, 1964. Gelatin print on paper mounted on fiberboard, 50½ × 63½ in. © 2023 Romare Bearden Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. © Tate, London / Art Resource, New York.

motion of the hand that held it. The body that directed the hand, together with the mind that so intently directed the body's action in this regard, was not far behind.[22] Putting these observations into the context of collage and the structures of jazz: Does the index represent the physical and visual markers of "breaks" in jazz improvisation successfully since the photostat points to the performance of the assemblage of the collage?

Bearden's 1967 work *Three Folk Musicians* provides a solid example of his incorporation of jazz music as a structural resource. Bearden takes part of the image—halves it—and juxtaposes another image. The juxtaposed image may or may not match the image with which it is connected. However, the juxtaposition of the images (rhythms) that *do* match creates a visual whole. Using various reproductions of photographs of disparate people, he selects parts of their body, clothing, and instruments and puts these parts together to give the impression of one body. Many bodies have been used, but, visually speaking, three whole musicians are created, each distinctive from the others.

Rather than just painting the musicians, Bearden substitutes reconstituted cutouts from various sources for each whole-body image. He compared his method to that of Picasso and Braque. Bearden understood that "instead of painting the whole thing—an orange or a bottle—you cut one out and put it in the still life. But it was painting. They would just put that in, rather than painting it itself—or newspaper, if they wanted that in a particular place. So I'm using it [the cutout] in the collage, but I really feel that I'm painting."[23] Bearden found a way to knit together the immediacy and autonomy of each separate source of collage and the painterly control of color and form.

Here is what I aim to convey about the visual and melodic paradigm in this book: with the undercurrent of music pulsing throughout the book in both subject matter and style, my hand creates a flow among Renée Stout (b. 1959), Radcliffe Bailey (1968–2023), and María Magdalena Campos-Pons (b. 1959). That flow "slips into the break" to produce a new visual-sonic model of the aesthetics of Black art. *Grime, Glitter, and Glass* explores how following the path of visual art aligned with music from the twentieth century into the twenty-first is a compelling avenue for recovering the disparate African diasporic influences within American culture and more specifically within the history of American art, broadly defined geographically as encompassing both North and South America.[24]

To elucidate those connections between the artists, I highlight in each chapter, which I call *verses*, musical and sonic examples within each artist's career. I include an examination of the cutting-edge gritty sights, sounds, and onstage personality of singer-songwriter Betty Davis, the complicated otherworldliness of Sun Ra, and the vibrant Afro-Cuban rhythms embedded in the performances of Celia Cruz. Through this, these visual artists and singer-songwriters make manifest the dynamism of the African diasporic musical expressions, specifically in the United States and the Caribbean.

I set out to answer, if only preliminarily, the following: How does the meaning of art change when visual artists like Stout, Bailey, and Campos-Pons not only document themes visually but also reference and/or transmit art sonically? Through the juxtaposition of visual art and music, can a model open up within the historiography of art to include not only jazz and, more recently, hip-hop but also funk and rumba in order to interpret art by Black artists from new perspectives? Does the physical presence of artists of African descent throughout the diaspora, of their actual bodies lodged within their work, anchor a theoretical authority not only through the materiality of the object/subject but also as a postmodernist turn toward resisting erasure?

I present Stout, Bailey, and Campos-Pons as Black artists with distinctive visual voices that are brought together in my own collagistic enterprise. Expressly, this book is a metaphorical photomontage, a Beardenesque cutting and pasting of their ideas, theories, mediums, and exercises through examples of photographs, prints, paintings, drawings, sculptures, assemblages, installations, and performances. What first drew me to explore Stout, Bailey, and Campos-Pons and their oeuvres in conversation with one another was their proclivity toward employing art practices, materials, and expressions shared throughout the African diaspora as active engagements with Western and Central African cultures. Their visual processes resonate compellingly because of their individual investment in interrogating both the artistic and spiritual vestiges of Black culture as part of the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade in North and South America.

In musical terms, the temptation exists to categorize this book as a "polyphonic" composition (multiple melodies) that creates a harmony. However, I metaphorically glue together the multiple objects and substances used by Stout (hair), Bailey (mud), and Campos-Pons (fish) along with song and sound references (Betty Davis's growls, Arrested Development's hit song "Tennessee," Neil Leonard's atmospheric recordings in Matanzas, Cuba) as a melodic endeavor. I conceive these artists as participating in a shared line of thought. That is to say, the dual concerns of the visual and the sonic allow the artists' visual voices to be seen/heard as melodic lines in conversation with one another within the contrapuntal structure I have created throughout.

The *Punctum* of Black Art

Scholarship and exhibitions by and about people of African descent have grown exponentially since I began studying the history of art in the 1990s. During the fall of 1996, I conducted research at Wesleyan University for my senior thesis on the artist Aaron Douglas's *Aspects of Negro Life* (1934), a four-part mural series originally installed at the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library that became part of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. I made my first visit that semester to view Douglas's paintings, which at that time, were held in the center's Art and Artifacts offices.[25]

At the Schomburg Center that fall, I internalized how a Black vision of scholarship could physically occupy space and offer an intellectual haven for people of African descent to search for and find their own visions and voices

within the African diaspora, including within the visual arts. In *Diasporic Blackness: The Life and Times of Arturo Alfonso Schomburg*, the literary and African diasporic scholar Vanessa Kimberly Valdés outlines the legacy of the Afro–Puerto Rican scholar for whom the Schomburg Center is named. She astutely identifies Schomburg as "an innovative and pioneering figure of early-twentieth century New York City, as a book collector and archivist; . . . he was also an autodidact, a prominent Freemason, a writer, and an institution builder."[26] Schomburg secured a historiography for future generations based on the literary, cultural, religious, and visual experiences of Black folk that would be available for all Americans (now globally through digital access).

Schomburg created a model for the preservation of African diasporic culture in New York City that primarily existed at historically Black colleges and universities located predominantly in the South. This "for us, by us," model for scholarship informs my determination to leave a trace, signified by my own "hand," in offering this research on Renée Stout, Radcliffe Bailey, and María Magdalena Campos-Pons as an intervention within the history of the arts of the African diaspora and, by extension, the history of American art.[27]

During the 1960s, coinciding with the introduction of African American and Africana studies programs and departments in higher education, the rise of Black-centered art institutions reflected a desire and demand for spaces for visual art by Black people.[28] During the late 1960s and 1970s, many heeded the call to ensure that new institutions within the world of art centered the art and artists of the African diaspora, including the Studio Museum in Harlem; the African American Museum in Philadelphia; the DuSable Black History Museum and Education Center in Chicago; the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit; the Anacostia Community Museum in Washington, DC; and the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Boston. These cultural centers along with innumerable galleries and collectives from Los Angeles to Atlanta to Pittsburgh blossomed within the United States after the critical periods of the civil rights movement and Black Arts Movement. Several institutions began to increasingly include more artists and works from outside the United States in order to consider art and artists from the Caribbean and Latin America and, of course, from the African continent: the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts in New York City (1999), the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco (2005), and the Museum of Black Civilisations in Dakar, Senegal (2018).

With continued high demand for entry to the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture since its opening

on September 24, 2016, the now-largest and most popular center for Black history, culture, and fine arts has demonstrated that there exists a growing interest in and desire for a deeper understanding and careful voicing of Black identity in the United States, and of African diasporic identity globally. Not everyone expected the high turnout, not even the Smithsonian Institution.[29] President Barack Obama made clear during the museum's opening that the building and its holdings held importance not only for people of African descent but for the nation as a whole:

> And so this national museum helps to tell a richer and fuller story of who we are. It helps us better understand the lives, yes of the president, but also the slave, the industrialist but also the porter, the keeper of the status quo but also the optimist seeking to overthrow that status quo, the teacher, or the cook, alongside the statesman.
>
> And by knowing this other story, we better understand ourselves and each other. It binds us together. It reaffirms that all of us are American, that African-American history is not somehow separate from our larger American story, it's not the underside of the American story.
>
> It is central to the American story, that our glory derives not just from our most obvious triumphs, but how we've wrested triumph from tragedy, and how we've been able to remake ourselves again, and again, and again, in accordance with our highest ideals.[30]

This infusion of Blackness bruises the art world. Such interference correlates to Roland Barthes's definition of *punctum* within photography: "For *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)."[31] As I explain in verse 2, James Snead's analysis of "the cut" in Black culture "leaves room for accidents," specifically through repetition in music, dance, speech, and literature.[32] Black culture—or the Black body—often serves as the *punctum* within American society.

The collected objects of the street are the elements of *punctum* within Renée Stout's assemblages that gather the "grime" of America, unsuspectingly binding Kongo-derived *minkisi* to imbue her work with strains of unknown powers, even in something as innocent as a dirty baby shoe in *Point of View* (1994). Radcliffe Bailey smears Georgia clay mud onto a corner of a photograph of the astounding site of the Great Mosque of Djenné in order to index the red soil of Mali, the latter a proven genetic link of the artist's ancestry, rectifying the prick (or sting) of the centuries of separation. María Magdalena Campos-Pons translates the experience of sugar visually in her reconstitution

of sugar and its references to the history of brutality and death in Cuba. She transfers that history phenomenologically into the museum galleries of New York City; Washington, DC; and Salem, Massachusetts through performance.

In the end, such maneuvering by the visual artists in *Grime, Glitter, and Glass* through their various mediums—the muck of viscous, wet plaster that becomes a skein (as skin), the spiky piano keys with a dazzling, blackened mannequin head, and the translucent molded glass sculptures with gurgling molasses—transmogrifies Black identity vis-à-vis the indexes of their works of art and their own bodies. Their multimedia works create the *punctum* from which the power of the white supremacist gaze leaks, thereby falsifying and letting the blood of the fragile authority of the stereotype.

A primary goal of modernist painting was to display the moment in which it was both physically and philosophically made, and to make its medium so much a part of its image that it could temporarily suspend the knowledge of its determinations, producing the sense that it had been made outside of, but also within, the limits of conventionally historical practice. This goal of conveying the moment of creation within a work of art is the source of the "presentness" that Michael Fried granted to modernism.[33] Collage conforms to the modernist avant-garde in its use of multiple materials and the numerous layers of meaning made available within a given work. Juxtaposing its disparate and fragmentary materials stressed its components as things, lessening their earlier functions even if they were representations in their original forms. Even postmodern theorists like Craig Owens recognized that the modernist avant-garde not only "sought to transcend representation in favor of presence and immediacy; it [also] proclaimed the autonomy of the signifier."[34] This "presentness" of modernism dimmed as a dominant ethos by the late 1960s.

Therefore, one might be tempted to assume that Bearden's photostats, as photographed versions of collage works, would also answer the call of the modernist avant-garde. However, can Bearden's photostats also be postmodern? When the edges and materiality of the pasted elements are flattened due to the photographic reproduction of the original collage, does the presence and immediacy of the signifier in the collage still exist? Francis Frascina defines writing on the interface of modern art and its social and political significance as follows: "The *signified* is the meaning, what the signifier stands for. . . . Thus the signified is (i) 'a collection of objects', (ii) their individual symbolism and—more importantly—(iii) the effect of their combination, the particular moral and social meaning of the whole picture. While we can distinguish between signifier and signified for the process of analysis, in prac-

tice they act together, they are materially inseparable. *Together* they constitute the *sign* as a whole, which has a particular meaning for an audience or community."[35] The indexical impact of collage in Bearden's photomontages, that is, its connection to specific events and places through traces, still exists, but its impact is lessened as a result of the photomontage process. The conflict between the work's material presence as "modern" and the fragmented representation of its shattered elements constitutes, even as it displays, a refusal of the exclusivity and anonymity of modernism's most autonomous form and leads to a more "postmodern" kind of signification. Bearden's photomontages are both modern and postmodern, and they came out of his understanding of jazz. The artists of *Grime, Glitter, and Glass* disturb an oversimplified reading of race within their work through their postmodern sensibilities, specifically because of the "breaks" wherein they improvise and, therefore, revise assumptions of Black identity.

Stuart Hall, a sociologist and cultural theorist, defined "cultural identity" as a "production" that is "always in process" and determined by a shared culture or collective with common historical experiences and cultural codes.[36] Even while addressing Black cultural identity specifically, Hall's characterization of the dualism of identity as both in flux and fixed helps delineate practically any group or collective (women, immigrants, and people with disabilities, for example). Nevertheless, differences within that collective preclude a universal experience or expression because historical transformation is constant.

Throughout the twentieth century, many Black visual artists continually combed the African diasporic archives of their history or histories to deconstruct and magnify the complexity of their cultural identities—politically, socially, and economically. After the fall of colonialism throughout the global south, movements arose to secure civil rights, to amplify women's voices, and to resist the marginalization of "others" throughout society. By the 1960s and 1970s, identity became an organizing principle within the art world writ large. Why? "Cultural politics" was at play. According to the American art critic Rosalind Krauss, cultural politics questions the continuity and perseverance of Western culture, its concept of so-called originality, and the initial assumptions of modernism as Western, capitalist, white, male, and heterosexual.[37] By the 1980s and 1990s, identity became a primary discourse, wherein institutions, curators, critics, and collectors could accept artists who pushed beyond the limitations of pure formalism. In its place, art and its social context stood on par with—or took precedence over—aesthetics and the practice of the individual artist.[38] Stout, Bailey, and Campos-Pons began

their art education and careers during this period of discourse on cultural identity and cultural politics.

As I address in verse 3, in 2014 Carrie Mae Weems became the first woman of African descent to have a solo retrospective exhibition at the Guggenheim. For more than thirty years, Weems and other artists of her generation, born in the middle of the twentieth century, including Lyle Ashton Harris, Adrian Piper, and Lorna Simpson, used photography, time-based performance, film, and installation to shape ways of understanding the world and ourselves. These artists focus on the body in society, racial and sexual stereotypes, and the construction of personae. Stout, Bailey, and Campos-Pons are their contemporaries. They each interrupt the meaning of their own bodily frames within specific sites, sometimes through self-portraiture, often with interplay between text and image. They interrogate identity and celebrate differences of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and nationalism.

Globally, museums are more open to embracing multivalent identities because museums are also in process, and art critics (including myself) are paying more attention to the unspoken, or "quiet," elements of art—the repeated elements that have been ignored. In *Listening to Images*, Tina Campt, a Black feminist theorist of visual culture and contemporary art, expertly theorizes the relationship between "quiet" art and everyday acts of refusal by the dispossessed.[39] According to Campt, sound can be felt even when not heard in the way that an image can be defiant or revolutionary through a quiet aesthetic. We, as viewers, need to pay more attention to the "quiet"—the dismissed and often disregarded—in order to have a fuller view of art, history, and identities. Translating the silent materialities of grime, glitter, and glass by Black artists into words within this book is but one effort to paradoxically reveal the quietness of the visual by insisting on their persistent cadences.

In verse 1, I examine the work of Renée Stout, deconstructing her deft manipulation of surface, found materials, and personalities to unveil her latent psychosexual authority. Through her physical and metaphysical presence, her work forces the viewer to sort through several layers of references—Africa, Stout herself in all her specificity, and womanhood. I highlight Stout's daring *Fetish #2*, a 1988 life-size cast of her own body as well as her personas, Madame Ching and Fatima Mayfield, in order to analyze the visual cultures of Black women's bodily self-presentations and misrepresentations.

Verse 1 also addresses Stout's orchestration of an array of signs in assemblages, room installations, and video in the guise of her personas. This work encourages the viewer to engage issues of Black femininity, masculinity, and

sexuality along with Kongo-inspired meanings of power. Her first political work, *Point of View*, is a 1994 assemblage with a prominently displayed black-and-white photograph of a Black man pointing a gun directly at the viewer. Why are we "held up" at gunpoint? Stout inscribes the answer below the photograph in yellow letters: "If you convince me I am ugly, I may act ugly." *Point of View* demands that the onlooker, or more influentially, the media, which becomes the impending victim, relent in—or more emphatically, surrender—its distorted portrayals of Black men as violent criminals. These portrayals, in concert with the debate over the portrayals of the Black community in hip-hop from the 1980s to the present, further complicate the reading of Black male and female bodies in American society, including Stout's own. Likewise, in *Thinking Room*, 2006, she dutifully edited a version of herself in 2006 in the HEMPHILL Artworks gallery for public viewing, a re-creation of the intimate space in her real home in Washington, DC. This, too, was a kind of "self-portrait," like *Fetish #2*, but through the guise of her persona Fatima. The use of her body and the devices of masquerade she employs for personal distancing blur the lines between reality and fantasy, forcing the observer to determine how they are supposed to consume or acquire them. Stout's methods force recognition of her physical and often spiritual presence, which thrusts her out from invisibility as a Black feminist artist.

By engaging the career of funk singer-songwriter Betty Davis in conversation with the artistic oeuvre of Renée Stout, I argue that Davis's funk facade complements Stout's art in unexpected ways. Stout and Davis have both attempted to control the production and expression of original material throughout their careers, most especially in the visual representations of themselves. In so doing, both artists exhibit Black feminist ambitions, deliberately or not. Stout's and Davis's artistic and musical forms, respectively, represent what I have coined as "feminist funk power," a *performative* funk that is gritty, sweaty, bold, and unapologetic because of the hard work invested in one's one artistic voice. In light of the originality of these artists' physical expression in their respective art forms, the resultant grime of this creative labor by Stout and Davis forces the viewer to reinvent their very conception of Black female agency.

Verse 2 treats Radcliffe Bailey, who created what I call *soundscapes*, in which one can metaphorically, and sometimes literally, hear the resonances of the African diaspora as painted, assembled, and mounted canvases, sculptures, and installations to reflect the visual timbre of the continent's influences from the Middle Passage to the present. Bailey recorded the historical forces of enslavement, the civil rights movement, and the Black Arts Movement as well as

the many issues still relevant to Black life and art in the twenty-first century. In Bailey's seminal installation *Windward Coast* (2009–present), I examine how a sea of disengaged piano keys filling a gallery space takes on an Afrofuturist vibe, as a disembodied charcoal-black, glittered head seemingly floats among the keys, while an unpredictable pattern of oceanic waves emanates from a shell in the corner of the room. Could this sparkling head be a portrait of Sun Ra? A piano player, pioneer of free jazz, and progenitor of funk music, Sun Ra subscribed to much of the philosophy surrounding Afrofuturism, a term associated with a type of Black science fiction that revitalizes the Black race, wherein an aesthetic mode—a *punctum*—interrupts white supremacist notions of futurism. Bailey's *Windward Coast*, in addition to Ellen Gallagher's multimedia photogravure *Abu Simbel* (2006), provides insight into the materiality of glitter and the potential of the sonic within African diasporic sites that shine in order to reveal sources of psychedelic redemption.

Bailey's compositions echo the visual tenor of African-inspired influences while using the tools of improvisation. In *Echo*, as installed at the Davis Museum at Wellesley College in 2011, a photograph printed on a metal plate shows the thirteenth-century Great Mosque of Djenné in Mali. The most obvious sound in *Echo* derives from the shell tethered to the photograph, which would become an echo chamber if put to one's ear. The shell serves to reveal Bailey's deep concern with the tragic history of enslaved Africans brought to the Americas, physically tying the conch to the African continent through the rope, increasing the work's ancestral meaning. Space and time collapse, and the viewers become participants in an unexpected improvisational performance that brings together the worlds of Mali, Georgia, and ultimately galleries to "hear" the chants ring through the mosque and quietly into the museum.

Verse 3 surveys the work of the Cuban-born artist María Magdalena Campos-Pons, who creates complex multimedia designs and presentations, including sculpture, installations, photography, video, and performance. Campos-Pons articulates her own vision of the world clearly in ways that interweave the worlds of Afro-Cuba and the United States seamlessly. I highlight the performance *Habla LAMADRE*, which took place during Carrie Mae Weems LIVE: Past Tense / Future Perfect in April 2014 at the Guggenheim Museum of New York, a weekend of programming of artist talks, music, and conversations in celebration of the exhibition *Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video*. Campos-Pons offered ceremonially on that Sunday morning her Afro-Cuban body as a site of the African diaspora and feminism in harmony with Carrie Mae Weems—and in dissonance with

the museum space—serving to complicate performance art as portraiture within contemporary art.

In *Alchemy of the Soul: María Magdalena Campos-Pons* at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, in January 2016, the artist showcased glass sculptures that harken to the architectural ruins of the sugar plantation where her family harvested sugar for generations and that she left over thirty years ago. Her performances make for a productive consideration of Afro-Cuban singer Celia Cruz, who playfully asserted "¡Azúcar negra!" (brown sugar)—also the name of one of her iconic songs—as a complex affirmation of her Blackness and recognition of the labor of the many Black bodies that endured the Middle Passage from Africa to the Americas to harvest sugar in places like Cuba. In *Identified*, performed at the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in 2016, Campos-Pons, collaborator Neil Leonard, jazz composer Terence Blanchard, and an entourage of dozens of performers took charge of the museum, as nearly six hundred people followed their movements through the galleries. Campos-Pons works skillfully to document the bittersweet history, or *historia agridulce*, of sugar, enslaved laborers, suffering, and, ultimately, death, by means of performance and visual and sound aesthetics.

By highlighting the careers and works of three artists, Renée Stout, Radcliffe Bailey, and María Magdalena Campos-Pons—artists who drive themselves into the center of the discourse through the insistent presence of their bodies in their work—in relation to each other, I reveal the intricacy of how they make themselves legible, recognizable, and at times even audible to the viewer in distinctive, yet resonant ways. The sonic components of their artworks and the complementary musical artists—Betty Davis, Sun Ra, and Celia Cruz, among others—provide additional levels for understanding the multifaceted manifestations of Black identity.

Within these pages, I articulate the intersection of Black identity and culture through the slippages, gaps, and breaks inside sound, music, and music culture. That culture, in turn, provides a platform for readers to explore the formal and philosophical development of Black visual culture as what I call here for the first time a *visual aesthetic musicality*. I offer *Grime, Glitter, and Glass* as a road map for exploring new avenues of African diaspora literacy, a more profound knowledge of the complex and varied expressions of Black identity within the history of art by people of African descent throughout the world, wherein I center the depth of the Black gaze.

Prelude. The Cadences of Black Art

1. Kern, "Modern American Museum," 271–84.
2. Hines was known for his "trumpet style" of piano playing, and he admired Armstrong's style in particular. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 140; and Dance, *World of Earl Hines*, 20.
3. Gates, introduction, xiv.
4. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 7–8.
5. Murray, *Blue Devils of Nada*; Murray, "Visual Equivalent of the Blues"; Murray, "Improvisation and the Creative Process," 111–13; and Ellison, "Art of Romare Bearden."
6. Gioia, *History of Jazz*, 56.
7. Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 8.
8. Gioia, *History of Jazz*, 51.
9. See my essay on Romare Bearden's *Projections* series for a fuller analysis: N. Greene, "Riffing the Index."
10. I am grateful for the enduring scholarship of Robert G. O'Meally on the musical influences of Bearden, which offered an early template for how to engage visual art and music. O'Meally, *Jazz Cadence*. The most up-to-date comprehensive research on and analysis of Bearden's life and art career was recently published: Campbell, *American Odyssey*. For more information on and exhibitions of Bearden's collages and photostats, see Ashton, *Romare Bearden*; Washington, *Art of Romare Bearden*; Corlett, *From Process to Print*; Gelburd and Golden, *Romare Bearden*; and Schwartzman, *Romare Bearden*.
11. O'Meally, preface, xi (emphasis mine).
12. Grove Music Online, s.v. "Cadence," by William S. Rockstro, George Dyson, William Drabkin, Harold S. Powers, and Julian Rushton, published online in 2001, https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.04523.
13. Romare Bearden, letter to Michael F. Gibson at the *International Herald Tribune*, dated June 15, 1975 [copy], Bearden Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

14. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 177–78.

15. Bearden, "'Inscription,'" 431–32.

16. "Seabreeze," by Fred Norman, Larry Douglas, and Romare Bearden, was first recorded by trumpeter Gerald Wilson in 1954 and later by Billy Eckstine, by jazz cellist Oscar Pettiford, and by Tito Puente, among others. Schwartzman, *Romare Bearden*, 174. In 2003, the Branford Marsalis Quartet recorded the album *Romare Bearden Revealed*, which included "Seabreeze," to accompany the retrospective exhibition *The Art of Romare Bearden* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC). "Seabreeze," recorded June 23–25, 2003, track 3 on Branford Marsalis Quartet, *Romare Bearden Revealed,* Marsalis Music, 2003, compact disc.

17. Bearden, *Riffs and Takes*, n.p. (emphasis mine).

18. Spiral, a group of several Black artists who first came together in 1963, formed in response to A. Philip Randolph's call for participation in the March on Washington. The group included the president, Norman Lewis, along with Charles Alston, James Yeargans, Hale Woodruff, Emma Amos, Richard Mayhew, William Williams, and Melvin Edwards, to name a few. Bearden's initial proposal for a collaborative project by Spiral members using collage was eventually dismissed. As the Spiral artists strove to individually relate various meanings within their own work to events, ideas, and principles of the civil rights movement, collage would have served as an efficient tool to present the multiple views of the artists. *Conjur Woman* (1964) was Bearden's contribution to the Spiral exhibition, a career-defining piece in terms of his turn toward collage as his primary medium. Coleman, "Changing Same," 149.

19. Schwartzman, *Romare Bearden*, 210–11.

20. The Romare Bearden Foundation in New York City houses Bearden's personal library, including books and journals from which he cut out pictures.

21. Shiff, "Performing an Appearance." Art historian Jacqueline Francis has presented research specifically on Bearden's fascination with hands of various shapes and sizes. More often than not, Bearden selected disproportionately large hands that emphasize and exaggerate gestures. Francis, "Bearden's Hands."

22. The exalted position of Jackson Pollock within abstract expressionism is due in part to the indexical function Pollock's body and his pours played as a sign for performance, captured in photographs and film that demonstrate this physicality of the index. See Shiff, "Performing an Appearance," 97–98. See also A. Jones, "'Pollockian Performative,'" in *Body Art*.

23. Bearden, "'Inscription,'" 440–41.

24. The parameters of how scholars categorize "American" art as specifically referencing the United States are changing. As scholars increasingly acknowledge the ever-changing political and physical landscape of the Americas and the ways the visual cultures of North and South America, including the Caribbean, influence one another, I commit to describing "American art" within these broader bound-

aries. I indicate the arts of specific regions more precisely throughout (i.e., Cuba, the American South, Brazil).

25. Mayhew, "Aaron Douglas' *Aspects*." Much of my research then was based on Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*. The panels now hang in the reading room of the Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division at the Schomburg Center.

26. Valdés, *Diasporic Blackness*, 2.

27. I am indebted to the many scholars and their respective institutions that make my research on art of the African diaspora contemporary. Thelma Golden's *Black Male* show at the Whitney Museum in New York opened in 1994 just when I knew that art history would become my vocation. I extend my appreciation for the scholarship and curatorial interventions of art historians and curators of Black art to the following: Samella Lewis, Floyd Coleman Sr., Kellie E. Jones, Lowery Stokes Sims, Leslie King-Hammond, Deborah Willis, Richard J. Powell, Michael D. Harris, Lisa Farrington, Cheryl Finley, Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, Valerie Cassel Oliver, Naima Keith, Tiffany E. Barber, Rujeko Hockley, La Tanya Autry, Chaédria Labouvier, Niama Safia Sandy, and so many others.

28. Cahan, *Mounting Frustration*.

29. McGlone, "More Visitors."

30. Obama, "NMAAHC Grand Opening Dedication"; and Reilly, "Read President Obama's Speech."

31. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.

32. Snead, "Repetition as a Figure."

33. Fried, "Shape as Form."

34. C. Owens, "Discourse of Others," 59.

35. Frascina, "Realism and Ideology," 90.

36. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity*, 222.

37. Krauss, *Originality of the Avant-Garde*.

38. N. Greene, "Identity," 171.

39. Campt, *Listening to Images*, 4–5. Throughout my career, I have explored how visual representations of music, songs, speeches, or sound effects can successfully evoke audible sounds, even if only symbolically, namely, in the collages of Romare Bearden. Many contemporary Black artists have contributed significantly to the expansion of the genre of "sound art," namely, Jennie C. Jones ("Sound," *Jennie C. Jones*, https://www.jenniecjones.com/sound, accessed January 29, 2024), Mendi and Keith Obadike ("About," Mendi + Keith Obadike, https://blacksoundart.com/about, accessed January 29, 2024), and collectives like Black Quantum Futurism ("About," *Black Quantum Futurism*, https://www.blackquantumfuturism.com/about, accessed January 29, 2024), among many others. I offer this book as a contribution to the field of sound art and, more specifically, to sonic studies within African diaspora studies, art history, American studies, and musicology.