

CCS Bard Convenes Leading Scholars to Explore How Black Art and Blackness  
Have Been Framed through Contemporary Exhibition-Making

Marking First Conference of its Kind, *Reshaping the Field: Arts of the African Diasporas  
On Display* to be Held Virtually November 4 – 6, 2021



Opening, 16th Annual Art Exhibition, 1957. Atlanta University Photographs Collection,  
Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library.

Annandale on Hudson, New York—October 12, 2021—The Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College (CCS Bard) presents *Reshaping the Field: Arts of the African Diasporas on Display*, a scholarly conference that explores a selection of pioneering exhibitions over the past century that have shaped the contemporary understanding of Black art. Marking the first conference to focus exclusively on African diasporic art exhibitions in the United States and the United Kingdom, *Reshaping the Field* spotlights case studies that have disrupted narratives about Black art and artists through presentations by some 20 leading art historians and curators, including **Richard Powell**, **Cheryl Finley**, **Serubiri Moses**, **Jamaal B. Sheats**, **Marlene Smith**, and **Lucy Steeds**, with keynote speakers **Bridget Cooks** on “Art, Museums, and the Fear of a Black Planet,” and **Monique Renee Scott** on “Museums and the Anthropological Myth-Making of Africa.”

Curated by CCS Bard Associate Professor and Luma Scholar **Dr. Nana Adusei-Poku**, *Reshaping the Field* is the first public milestone of its Black Exhibition Histories initiative—which was

launched in 2019 to collect understudied archives of influential Black scholars, curators, gallerists, and artists—and a key part of CCS Bard’s 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary season of programming. The conference will be held virtually from November 4 – 6, 2021. An up-to-date conference schedule can be found [here](#), and event registration [here](#). Essays by each participant, documenting their research and presentations, will be compiled into a comprehensive anthology, to be published by CCS Bard together with Afterall as part of the latter’s Exhibition Histories series in 2022.

In conjunction with the conference, CCS Bard opens a special exhibition on Elvira Dyangani Ose’s critical curatorial practice, organized by writer and independent curator Serubiri Moses (CCS Bard 2019). On view from November 4 through 14, 2021 in the CCS Bard Galleries, ***The Open Work: An Exhibition History of Elvira Dyangani Ose*** draws from bibliographic sources, books, catalogs, and exhibition ephemera to present an overview of the curator’s work and impact on Black and African art and artists over the past 15 years.

*“Reshaping the Field* seeks to address gaps in dominant art historical narratives that have traditionally overlooked and undervalued Black exhibition histories. This conference brings together art historians, curators, and artists who have researched or borne witness to these histories first-hand, with the goal not only to gather and share knowledge, but also to generate new primary sources, as work in this field continues to flourish,” said Dr. Adusei-Poku.

“We look forward to inaugurating the first public moment in CCS Bard’s Black Exhibition Histories initiative with *Reshaping the Field*, bringing in audiences to engage in our program to drive new research in the curatorial field,” said Lauren Cornell, Director of the Graduate Program and Chief Curator at CCS Bard. “Adusei-Poku has developed the conference across multiple years, and it unfolds synergistically with the pedagogy of the Graduate Program and our evolving public resources, which include our library, archives, and collection.”

*Reshaping the Field* is inspired by art historian and curator Bridget Cooks’s groundbreaking monograph *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (2011), which was the first critical exploration of exhibitions in major American art museums that focus on African American artists. Using that and Cooks’s keynote presentation as a launchpad for discussion, the convening will expand the record of exhibition histories through an exploration of pioneering shows that have shaped the domain of Black art today. Each panel discussion will examine the underlying tension between the concept of art as being universal versus identity-specific, showing that the question of Black identity in art and exhibition-making is inherently historically and systemically produced. A particular focus will hence lie on the formative role of historically Black colleges and universities, from the 19th to the mid-20th century, in developing collections and supporting artists that enabled the field’s development. The conference additionally aims to reflect on the sociopolitical circumstances that were essential to the emergence of a field of study and mode of exhibiting that is constantly reshaping itself and challenging normative orders.

Confirmed speakers at the conference include:

- **Mora J. Beauchamp-Byrd**, Associate Professor at the University of Tampa, US
- **Bridget Cooks**, Associate Professor in the Department of Art History and the Department of African American Studies, University of California, Irvine, US
- **Abby Eron**, Registrar at the Howard University Gallery of Art
- **Amber Esseiva**, Associate Curator at the Institute for Contemporary Art, Virginia Commonwealth University, US and CCS Bard alum
- **Cheryl Finley**, Inaugural Distinguished Visiting Director of the Atlanta University Center Collective for the Study of Art History & Curatorial Studies, Spelman College, and Professor of Art History at Cornell University, US
- **Languid Hands (Imani Robinson and Rabz Lansiquot)**, independent curators and Curatorial Fellows at Cubitt Gallery, UK
- **Julie McGee**, Associate Professor of Africana Studies and Art History and Director of the Interdisciplinary Humanities Research Center, University of Delaware, US
- **Kobena Mercer**, Associate Professor at Bard College, US
- **Derek Conrad Murray**, Professor of Art History at the University of California, Santa Cruz, US
- **Serubiri Moses**, independent curator and CCS Bard alum, US
- **Senam Okudzeto**, Artist and Educator, Switzerland and US
- **Monique Renee Scott**, Professor of Art History and Director of Museum Studies at Bryn Mawr College, US
- **Jamaal B. Sheats**, Director of Fisk University Galleries, US
- **Richard J. Powell**, John Spencer Bassett Professor of Art & Art History at Duke University, US
- **Howard Michael Singerman**, Phyllis and Joseph Caroff Chair of Art and Art History at Hunter College, City University of New York, US
- **Marlene Smith**, artist, curator, and Research Manager of Black Artists and Modernism, University of the Arts London and Middlesex University London, UK
- **Lucy Steeds**, Reader at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London, UK
- **Brittany Webb**, Curator at the John Rhoden Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, US.

*Reshaping the field: Arts of the African Diasporas on Display* is organized by Dr. Nana Adusei-Poku, Associate Professor and Luma Scholar at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College. This conference is made possible in part through the generous support of the Luma Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Terra Foundation for American Art, and through funding from Dutchess Tourism, administered by Arts Mid-Hudson.

### **About the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College**

The Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College (CCS Bard) is the leading international graduate program dedicated exclusively to curatorial studies, a field exploring the historical, intellectual, and social conditions that inform exhibition-making. With the Marieluise Hessel Collection of Contemporary Art at its core, alongside extensive and growing library and archival holdings, CCS Bard has served as an incubator for the most experimental and innovative practices in artistic

and curatorial practice since its founding in 1990. Through its rigorous, interdisciplinary program and unmatched resources, CCS Bard provides unparalleled opportunities for students to research and organize museum exhibitions on an independent basis, and in so doing acts as a key platform for the next generation of curators, artists, and art world leaders in the earliest stages of their careers. CCS Bard receives support from a range of public and private foundations and individuals, including major support from the Luma Foundation.

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