

Perspectives On Portraiture

From nine-thousand-year-old Neolithic burial masks to today's selfie, portraiture tells the dramatic, and often controversial, story of how human beings represent themselves and others. The invention of photography, in 1839, marked a radical turning point in the history of portraiture, challenging artists in other mediums, such as painting and sculpture, to profoundly reimagine how, and why, they depict the human form. The Lumpkin-Boccuzzi Family Collection of Contemporary Art features a wide range of portraiture including painting (Lynette Yiadom-Boakye), sculpture (Lonnie Holley), collage (Wardell Milan), and photography (LaToya Ruby Frazier). Taken together, the works on view reveal a spectrum of approaches to portraiture from direct figurative representation, to questioning the histories of mis- and underrepresentation, to expanded notions of what constitutes a portrait.

These contemporary black artists who shape, and reshape, the black experience further the concerns of a lineage of African American portraiture that spans from the portraits of abolitionist Frederick Douglass, to the

studio photography of James VanDerZee, to the pioneering photojournalism of Gordon Parks. In Paul Mpagi Sepuya's *Dark Room Mirror Study (0x5A1531)* (2017), the artist questions the relative absence of representations of gay men of color in the photographic record by making visual reference to the early history of studio photography. Gerald Sheffield's *kbr contractor (Iraq 2007)* (2018) points to potential futures of representation across perceived racial barriers.

Young, Gifted, and Black also demonstrates how artists have broadened definitions of portraiture beyond the figurative. It is in this spirit that text-based works, such as Glenn Ligon's *Study for Impediment* (2007), which frames the use of racial slurs as a physical and ethical impairment, are included as examples of conceptual or non-traditional portraiture.