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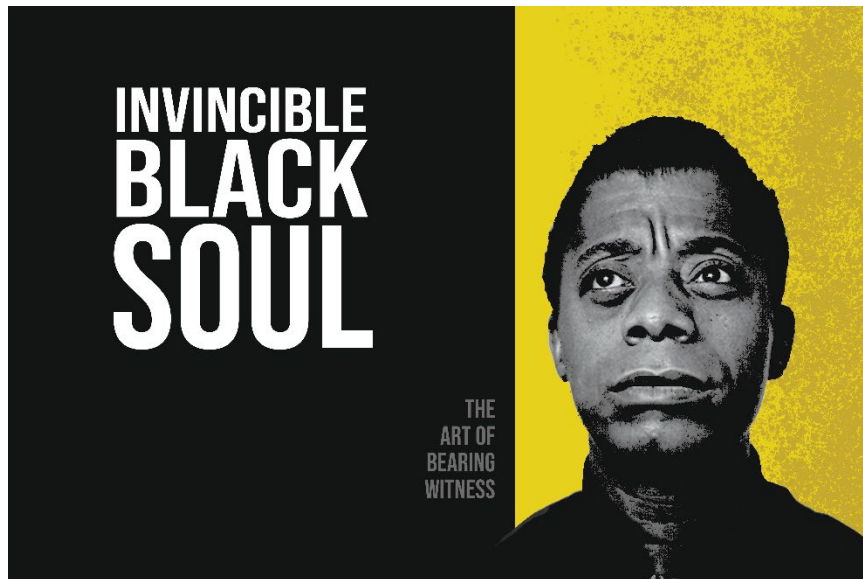
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*****PRESS RELEASE*****

***Invincible Black Soul: The Art of Bearing Witness* Explores the Influence and Legacy of Prolific Writer and Activist, James Baldwin, In New SFAC Main Gallery Exhibition**

New exhibition featuring the works of Mark Harris, Raymond L. Haywood, and Bryan Keith Thomas coming soon to the Arts Commission Main Gallery



(Image by Mark B. Anstendig. Designed by Bria Goelier and Mark Harris)

SAN FRANCISCO, April 24, 2023 – The San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) Main Gallery is thrilled to present ***Invincible Black Soul: The Art of Bearing Witness***, a three-person exhibition featuring the works of artists Mark Harris, Raymond L. Haywood, and Bryan Keith Thomas. The exhibition explores the work and legacy of influential novelist, playwright, activist, and public intellectual, James Baldwin.

Invincible Black Soul: The Art of Bearing Witness opens on **May 19, 2023** at the SFAC Main Gallery in the War Memorial Veterans Building and will be on view through **July 8, 2023**.

“Black people need witnesses in this hostile world which thinks everything is white.”

– James Baldwin

“James Baldwin is my favorite writer and essayist because he spoke so passionately on the reckoning of racial justice issues, as a necessary requirement to realize our full humanity,” said **Ralph Remington**, Director of Cultural Affairs. “Baldwin once said: *“the artist is a disturber of the peace. He is produced by the people because the people need him; they may not like him, they may stone him, but they need him. His sole responsibility is to bear witness to and for the people who produced him.”* Baldwin also famously wrote about white supremacy when he stated *“I can’t believe what you say because I see what you do.”* Baldwin was our prophetic fierce Black warrior-artist. He was also proudly queer at a time when his very life could have been snatched for even acknowledging the possibility. In these somewhat dark and troubled times Baldwin’s testimony reminds us that the work of dismantling white supremacy and homophobia is never done, while concurrently shining a light as a beacon to our future. The San Francisco Arts Commission is honored to bring this powerful and moving exhibition to the Main Gallery and to provide a space for three phenomenal local artists to explore the work and impact of James Baldwin.”

Invincible Black Soul explores Baldwin’s ideas and examines how artists across different media continue to use art as a tool to bear witness to the times.

Curated by artist Mark Harris, the exhibition looks at these themes through the lens of three Black Bay Area artists. The works by Harris, Haywood, and Thomas create a diverse range of responses to Baldwin’s life and writings, from a direct reference to his work to more general reflections on what it means to bear witness to their surroundings.

“Invincible Black Soul serves to remind viewers of Baldwin’s legacy and of the ongoing struggle for justice and equity in America,” state exhibition curator and artist, **Mark Harris**. “The artists unpack the complexities of Baldwin’s work and invite viewers to consider the ways in which his writing and activism continue to shape conversations today. It is a reminder of the courage and resilience of those who continue to speak out against injustice and oppression, and a call to action to create a more just world.”

“We’re excited to be working with three fantastic artists from the Bay Area who shed light on the connections between past and present injustices through their art,” said **Carolina Aranibar-Fernandez**, Director of Galleries and Public Programs for the San Francisco Arts Commission. “It’s a true privilege to show their impactful work at the SFAC main gallery.”

Mark Harris’ cutting edge mixed media works combine his passions for art and activism and draw heavily on the current socio-political climate in America. His collages are a form of reclamation, a way of asserting the presence of Black voices, Black dignity, and humanity. Through the juxtaposition of color and found imagery, Harris’ work seeks to challenge assumptions and provoke conversations and reflections.

Raymond L. Haywood's abstract paintings use color, movement, and texture to express emotion. Using salvaged materials, such as found wood—a nod to his background in woodworking and carpentry—Haywood's paintings each stem from a particular feeling the artist is trying to express. Using a process of layering and excavation, Haywood's paintings use abstraction to articulate emotional depths.

Bryan Keith Thomas's use of historic symbols that celebrate the Black experience imbue his sculptural works with deep meaning. Thomas incorporates objects and images such as cotton, roses, seeds, church fans, mirrors, nails and many other objects that speak to the history of Africans and African Americans. His works draw a connection between the past and the present day by using rich imagery steeped in meaning and history.

Exhibition Details

Invincible Black Soul: The Art of Bearing Witness

May 19 – July 8, 2023

SFAC Main Gallery, War Memorial Veterans Building

401 Van Ness Avenue, Suite 126, San Francisco, CA 94102

Wednesday – Saturday, noon – 5 p.m.

Free and open to the public

Public Reception Details

Friday, May 19, 6 – 8 p.m.

SFAC Main Gallery, War Memorial Veterans Building

401 Van Ness Avenue, Suite 126, San Francisco, CA 94102

No reservation required. Free and open to the public

Public Programming Details

All programs take place at the SFAC Main Gallery and are free and open to the public.

Artist Talk

Wednesday, May 31 | 6:30 p.m. (Doors at 6:00 p.m.)

Moderated by Demetri Broxton, Senior Director of Education at the Museum of the African Diaspora (MOAD)

Also Belongs to Me/the World: Solo

Saturday, June 10 | 3:00 p.m.

Solo performance by Gabriele Christian responding to James Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room*.

Curator Walkthrough

Saturday, June 17 | 2:00 p.m.

Join exhibition curator and artist Mark Harris for a tour of *Invincible Black Soul*.

Also Belongs to Me/the World: Trio

Wednesday, June 28 | 6:30 p.m. (Doors at 5:30 p.m.)

Gabriele Christian with collaborators with jose e. abad and NIC Kay perform in response to James Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room*. Q&A with performers to follow.

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About The San Francisco Arts Commission

The San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) is the City agency that champions the arts as essential to daily life by investing in a vibrant arts community, enlivening the urban environment and shaping innovative cultural policy. Our programs include: Civic Art Collection, Civic Design Review, Community Investments, Public Art, SFAC Galleries, and Art Vendor Licensing. To learn more, visit sfartscommission.org.