

Dawoud Bey, "Top Ten," *Artforum*, February 2025

ARTFORUM

TOP TEN

DAWOUDE BEY

Dawoud Bey is an artist and MacArthur Fellow based in New York and Chicago; he is currently a critic at Yale University School of Art. His exhibition "Stony the Road" is on view at New York's Sean Kelly Gallery through February 22, 2025. (See Contributors.)

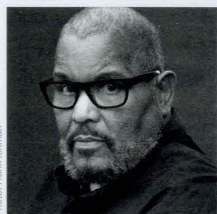


Photo: Frank Iselman



CHRISTINA SHARPE *In the Wake*
On Blackness and Being



1. Torkwase Dyson, *Liquid Shadows, Solid Dreams (A Monastic Playground)*, 2024, wood, stone, acrylic, graphite. Installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photo: Ron Amstutz. 2. LaToya Ruby Frazier, *Grandma Ruby's Recliner*, 2009, gelatin silver print, 23 1/4 x 19 1/4". From the series "The Notion of Family," 2001–14. 3. Cover of Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016). Comelia Parker, *Hanging Fire (Suspected Arson)*, 1999. 4. View of "Edges of Ailey," 2024–25, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Photo: Jason Lowrie/BFA.

1

TORKWASE DYSON Her practice as a painter and sculptor continues to both awe and inspire me. Through the conceptual framework of what she calls Black Compositional Thought, she wields the language of abstraction as a liberatory tool, creating works that ultimately embody a path to freedom. Her fifth-floor rooftop commission for the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, *Liquid Shadows, Solid Dreams (A Monastic Playground)*, 2024, served as an enveloping beacon, transforming each encounter into an opportunity to transcend the quotidian. It was a space for play, retreat, and contemplation set inside two monumental black sculptural forms.

2

LATOYA RUBY FRAZIER "Monuments of Solidarity," Frazier's expansive survey exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art, was the deep-dive exhibition this photographer has always deserved. The show began with "The Notion of Family," a 2001–14 series of pictures featuring her immediate relatives in Braddock, Pennsylvania, along with photographs and texts produced with Covid-19 health workers in Baltimore. The artist continues to craft images implicating the systems of inequity that impede the quality of life for working people even as she creates tender and deep representations of kin, standing in dignity and resistance. Hers is a deeply humanizing and incisive practice.

3

CHRISTINA SHARPE The author's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016) first caught my attention when I was doing research for a series of history-based projects I've been working on since 2012. The book brilliantly lays out a compelling thesis of how the institution of slavery continues to shape the contours of contemporary society, ordering it into pernicious, disruptive forms that have infiltrated all aspects of diasporic Black life. *In the Wake* also delineates the ways spaces for Black cultural production have been created through structures wrought by slavery.

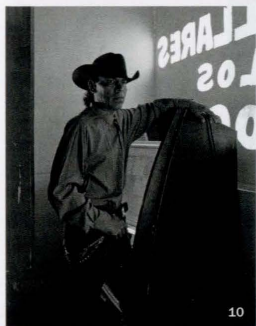
4

ADRIENNE EDWARDS The curator's visionary "Edges of Ailey" exhibition at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art is a tour de force or, as Edwards calls it, "an extravaganza." The show—featuring paintings, drawings, photographs, sculptures, films, music, and a wide selection of archival materials—is an expansive reimagining of the curatorial act itself, centering the life and work of one of the most significant Black dancers and choreographers in the United States. It is a radical spatial presentation: The walls are painted a deep red while on the floor are a series of freestanding display structures that call to mind the set elements of a theatrical production. Kudos to Edwards for also including in the mix artists whose work and names will be new to many visitors.



5. **Zun Lee**, *Bedtime shenanigans with Carlos Richardson and his daughter Selah, Harlem, New York, August 2012*. From Maurice Berger's *Race Stories: Essays on the Power of Images* (Aperture, 2024).

6. **Lakecia Benjamin**, *New York, 2023*. Photo: Elizabeth Letzell. 8. **Norman Teague**, *Booming Riffs* (detail), 2024, inkjet print, 40 x 30". 9. **RaMell Ross**, *Nickel Boys*, 2024, 4K video, color, sound, 140 minutes. Elwood (Ethan Herisse) and Turner (Brandon Wilson). 10. **Daniel Ramos**, *Querendon*, 2018, inkjet print, 52 x 40".



5

MAURICE BERGER (1956–2020) *Race Stories: Essays on the Power of Images* (2024) is a collection of Berger's writings, edited by Marvin Heiferman, that crucially helps to preserve and extend the late historian's legacy. Written between 2012 and 2019, the texts tackle the fraught relationships between race, images, and power. Berger took an unflinching view of photography—he understood that this vital medium, both demagogic and democratic, could be used to either critically interrogate or hideously reinforce the ways we think about culture and difference.

6

LAKECIA BENJAMIN, JOEL ROSS, AND IMMANUEL WILKINS As a former drummer, I feel right at home in the contemporary jazz music scene. Jazz clubs are my thinking rooms, the places where I go to both relax and be inspired. No matter where I've heard Benjamin, Wilkins (both saxophonists), and Ross (a vibraphonist) play—whether in a concert hall or a more intimate setting—they electrify. These three always leave me feeling energized—the future of music is bright and in very good hands with them. Benjamin further distinguished herself this past year by garnering an impressive three Grammy nominations.

7

JASON MORAN Moran is a pianist, artist, and composer of the highest caliber who has an abiding respect for and encyclopedic knowledge of music history. A number of his projects have paid homage to some of the greatest musicians of the past, including James Reese Europe and his Harlem Hell Fighters band, who introduced jazz to European audiences during World War I. Last year, Moran performed Europe's music at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra with the eighty-piece Kenwood Academy High School Marching Band—it was the most thrilling staging of this bandleader's work to date. As Moran once told me, when it comes to making art, "you don't have to start from scratch!"

8

"DESIGNER'S CHOICE: NORMAN TEAGUE—JAM SESSIONS" (MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK, 2024–25) This ambitious curatorial project revisits the museum's collection to raise questions about the role institutions play in what gets venerated or discarded throughout history. Teague, an artist and designer based in Chicago, takes these objects and, through acts of radical (and at times playful) Black imagination, envisions more funkified versions of them via generative AI. Such reconfigurations may have already existed had there been an unrestrained Black aesthetic embraced by certain design studios of yore.

9

RAMELL ROSS, NICKEL BOYS (2024) This photographer and experimental filmmaker's first commercial motion picture is a knockout. The accolades it has received are fully justified. Based on a 2019 novel by Colson Whitehead, Ross makes all kinds of adventurous and risky formal and narrative choices in this story about two abused teens trapped in a wretched "reform" school in the American South during the 1960s. Breaking the fourth wall, Ross—along with cinematographer Jomo Fray—gets inside the eyes of the protagonists to tell a disturbing tale in which the viewer becomes implicated.

10

DANIEL RAMOS I've been aware of Ramos's work for some two decades now. He is a photographer of enduring passion and rigor, and his art always touches the heart as it engages the eye and mind. Ramos mines personal and familial migration stories to give his pictures a compelling visual form. His 2023 exhibition at Baxter Street at the Camera Club of New York, "*Eres Muy Hermosa*" (You Are Very Beautiful), featured eight large-scale portraits of working-class men and women in Monterrey, Mexico, which filled the modestly scaled Chinatown space. He was also a fellow in the Whitney Museum of American Art's 2023–24 Independent Study Program. Ramos seems poised to land on everyone's radar. □