

 

The nation's leading newspaper and source of information on antiques and the arts.

## 'Blues For Smoke' On View At The Whitney Museum

Feb 26th, 2013



Beauford Delaney, "Portrait of Charlie Parker," 1968, oil on canvas, 28¾ by 23½ inches. Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York.

### New York City

The Whitney Museum of American Art presents "Blues for Smoke," an interdisciplinary exhibition that explores a wide range of contemporary art through the lens of the blues and the blues aesthetic. The exhibition is on view through April 28 in the museum's third-floor Peter Norton Family Galleries.

Turning to the blues not simply as a musical category but as a field of artistic sensibilities and cultural idioms, the exhibition features works by nearly 50 artists from the 1950s to the present, as well as materials culled from music and popular entertainment. "Blues for Smoke" was conceived and developed by Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) curator Bennett Simpson, in consultation with the artist Glenn Ligon. The New York installation is being overseen by Whitney curator Chrissie Iles.

[Click Here](#)

To View The Full Edition of Antiques and The Arts Weekly

Auctions

Shows

for 2/27/2013

### Special Show Sections:

CT Spring Antiques Show, March 16-17

2013 Calendar of Antique Shows & Flea Markets

### Featured Dealers (more...)



M. Finkel & Daughter



American Primitive Gallery

### Free Antiques News

- Our list is private -  
Email:

### Dealer Associations

Antiques Dealers Associations

### Special Sections





Throughout the past century, writers and thinkers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, Albert Murray, Amiri Baraka and Cornel West have asserted the fundamental importance of the blues both to American music (in its legacy and influence on jazz, R&B, rock and hip-hop) and to developments in literature, film and visual art. In all its diversity, the blues has been hailed as one of America's greatest cultural achievements and, along with jazz, has even been called America's classical music.

The origins of the blues lie in the vernacular culture of African Americans living in the Mississippi Delta and New Orleans around the turn of the Twentieth Century — people for whom slavery was a recent memory and basic civil rights were far in the future. As the literary historian Houston A. Baker writes, the blues emerged from a matrix of "work songs, group seculars, field hollers, sacred harmonies, proverbial wisdom, folk philosophy, political commentary, ribald humor, elegiac lament and much more."

Rather than retelling this story, "Blues for Smoke" proposes that certain topics in contemporary art might be understood through and animated by the prism of the blues. These include a grappling with personal and social catastrophe; an emphasis on improvisation and movement; the performance of extravagant or ambiguous identities; modes of abstraction and repetition; the expression of sexuality and intimacy; and an impulse towards archiving, sampling and translation.

The exhibition includes more than 90 works in a wide variety of mediums, including photography, video, painting, drawing, sculpture and multimedia installations, such as Stan Douglas's "Hors-champs," 1992, which appears in the museum's Lobby Gallery, and David Hammons's "Chasing the Blue Train," 1989, which greets visitors as they enter the show.

Many works in the exhibition clearly conjure the history and aesthetics of the blues, including Romare Bearden's collages of musicians, Roy DeCarava's atmospheric photographs of music halls and Beauford Delaney's portrait paintings of African American cultural figures. Others communicate blues ideas without expressly naming them as such: the emphasis on memory and cross-cultural interpretation in works such as Glenn Ligon's "Richard Pryor" paintings, Renée Green's "Import/Export Funk Office," 1992–93, and Kara Walker's video "Fall Frum Grace: Miss Pipi's Blue Tale," 2011.

The exhibition's title is drawn from a 1960 solo album by virtuoso jazz pianist Jaki Byard in which improvisation on the blues form becomes a basis for avant-garde exploration. The title suggests that the expanded poetics of the blues is pervasive — but also diffuse and difficult to pin down.

This exhibit is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalog published MOCA and Prestel/Delmonico.

The Whitney is at 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street. For general information, 212-570-3600 or [www.whitney.org](http://www.whitney.org) .

Antiques and the Arts Editorial Content