

'Soul Of A Nation' – Beyonce and Kendrick Lamar's links to Tate Modern's powerful new exhibition



Credit: Getty Images



By

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'Soul of a Nation: Art In The Age Of Black Power' looks at black American art in the age of the Civil Rights movement

One of the must-see art shows of the year, Tate Modern's [Soul of a Nation: Art In The Age Of Black Power](#) might only feature works created in the 20 years from 1963-1983, but in the age of Black Lives Matter movement and sustained police brutality in the US, its message of resistance resonates strongly today. We spoke to the gallery's curator Mark Godfrey about the role music plays in the exhibition and how modern black American musicians – from Beyonce and Kendrick to D'Angelo and The Roots – hark back to the ideas and inspirations behind the featured works.

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Mark Godfrey: "Much of the greatest black music of the last five years has looked back to these periods. The Roots used a Romare Bearden collage [['Pittsburgh Memory'](#), below] that we've got in the first room on an album cover (see below). Beyonce's 'Formation' video looked at the aesthetics of the Black Panthers. D'Angelo's 'Black Messiah' and many of Kendrick's albums are dealing with the kind of aesthetics from the memories of this period. I think there's quite a big connection with the music of today and its connection with the art in this period."



How integral is music to the exhibition?

"It was part of everyone's culture. There are abstract painters in the show who talk a lot about the role of John Coltrane. In the painting 'Trane' by William T. Williams [see below] and he's thinking about the sheets of sound of John Coltrane's music. Another painting by Jack Whitten comes out of what Jack describes as going to see John Coltrane five nights in a row in a jazz club in New York and really thinking of Coltrane's approach to music and his own approach to painting and to light. There's another work called 'What's Going On', which, if you know the opening bars of Marvin Gaye's song, you know is about a group of people meeting on the street. He imagines the picture of those people greeting each other."



Tell us about the special Spotify playlist you can listen to as you walk around the exhibit

“The Art Ensemble of Chicago is who we’ve chosen for the AfriCOBRA (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists) room. We’ve got ‘Young, Gifted & Black’. We’ve got Stevie Wonder’s ‘Black Man’ from ‘Songs In The Key Of Life’. In the first room, where we think about the high point of the Civil Rights movement, we’ve got Nina Simone’s ‘I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free’.”

There’s also a special compilation with Soul Jazz coming out, ‘Afro-Centric Visions in the Age of Black Power: Underground Jazz, Street Funk & The Roots of Rap 1964-79**’. Why did you want to work with that label in particular?**

“I’ve collected Soul Jazz compilations for over twenty years. I started buying them in the mid-90’s when I was a student and I’ve always gone to that record shop in Soho so I went to see Stuart Baker and I wanted to research and ask about his research into music labels like Tribe Records, Black Jazz, Strata-East. Our show is set up according to different communities of artists across the States, in LA, in Chicago and so on. I wanted to say to him ‘How much did the artists working in Detroit with Tribe Records know the artists working with Strata-East in New York?’ to try and see if there was a connection between the forms of circulation of music then. That then lead to me talking to him about doing a compilation that would accompany our show.”

Soul of a Nation: Art In The Age Of Black Power runs until October 22 at London’s Tate Modern