



PUSHING FORWARD



**Politics, Social Conflict,
and the Racial Divide
in the Art of Kevin Cole**



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On behalf of University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC), I am pleased and proud to introduce the exhibition *Pushing Forward: Politics, Social Conflict, and the Racial Divide in the Art of Kevin Cole*.

For more than 75 years, UMGC has worked to bring education within reach for underserved populations, including adult learners in the workforce and the military. Our Arts Program, in turn, serves to expand on and support that mission, introducing the works of new and emerging talents and extending the audiences of established artists.

The works of Kevin Cole offer a perfect example of this alignment. Cole, an internationally renowned artist who taught for more than 30 years in Atlanta area public schools, uses vibrant colors and dynamic shapes and patterns to celebrate the human spirit and wrestle with social and societal issues that challenge us to this day.

The works on display span more than 40 years and exhibit a timeless relevance. They are engaging and deeply thought-provoking, inviting those who view them to see the world in different lights and from new perspectives.

In short, they continue Cole's legacy as both an artist and an educator, and we are honored to showcase his exquisite mastery and enlightening worldview.

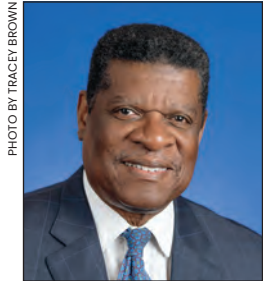
I hope you find this remarkable exhibition as inspiring and engaging as I do, and I thank you for your continued support for and belief in the importance of art, of learning, and of our UMGC Arts Program.

GREGORY FOWLER, PhD
PRESIDENT
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
GLOBAL CAMPUS

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The Arts Program at UMGC prides itself on presenting works by artists who have demonstrated their artistic talents by creating art for a good part of their lives and, as a result, have a body of work with a story to share. Internationally known artist Kevin Cole is no exception. His engaging works relate thoughtful stories and histories, serving as a testimony to and a reflection of issues in our society while at the same time evoking a response from the viewer. The Arts Program is therefore pleased to present an exhibition of approximately 50 of Cole's works, spanning more than 40 years.

Born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, in the 1960s, Cole spent his formative years hearing the history of African Americans from family members. Pine Bluff was a site for sit-ins, demonstrations, boycotts, and bombings. It was also a place to hear great jazz, blues, and soul music, providing additional fuel for his creativity. Cole later moved to Atlanta, Georgia, which became his adopted home of inspiration, dedication, and exploration. He spent more than 30 years as an art educator in the Fulton County School System and received numerous awards, grants, and fellowships for both his teaching and his art. His artwork has been featured in more than 490 exhibitions and 4,000 public, private, and corporate collections throughout the United States and abroad. Cole was inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame in 2018.

Cole's art explores the lives of African Americans in the United States. He addresses topics such as lynching, voting rights, and religion through African design elements. With the use of these known African aesthetics in his art, Cole became a member of the famed AfriCOBRA (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists) collective. His artist statement offers a path to further understanding the renowned artist and his art. In the first sentence, Cole references author Touré's work *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?*, which "defines 'post-blackness' as a way for African American artists to be identified such that their works can be seen beyond the sociological/stereotypical definition of 'Black Art.'" Cole explains, "My art is a colorful reminder of promises still unkept, imperialism still institutionalized, and stealth deceit that has stolen the dreams and birthrights of twenty generations of a once proud people."

Cole's works are colorful and subjectively pleasing to the eye, but the language of his art carries a deeper message for its viewer. It is this deeper message that we hope to unpack in this exhibition.

ERIC KEY
DIRECTOR, ARTS PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
GLOBAL CAMPUS



Kevin Cole's abstract works are imbued with symbolism that speaks to the legacy of racial injustice. Recurring motifs of knots, tangles, and loops are actually sinister references to a story passed down from his grandfather that recounts the brutal lynching of young African Americans by their neckties, a chilling reminder of the violence used to suppress voting rights. Yet Cole's works are also rendered in vibrant colors and dynamic patterns, representing the enduring strength and resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

Cole's imagery and messages speak to the principles of abstract expressionism, a movement that emerged alongside the civil rights movement. Abstract expressionism embraced a break from traditional forms, prioritizing raw emotion and the act of creation itself. This resonated with Black artists who felt excluded from the mainstream art world. Abstraction allowed them space to express their unique experiences and inner struggles without limitations.

However, the relationship between abstract expressionism and the civil rights movement was uneasy. While the abstract expressionism movement championed artistic freedom, the art world itself remained largely segregated. Even within the realm of abstrac-

tion, Black artists often faced pressure to downplay their racial identity to gain recognition. Additionally, the art movement's emphasis on personal expression could be seen as overlooking the urgent social issues of the time.

Despite these challenges, Black artists like Cole found ways to leverage abstraction for powerful purposes. Cole's works celebrate joy—a defiant act in a society that sought to erase it. Common household objects and Black living spaces become displays of how peaceful and simple life could be without violence and forceful interruptions. The daily struggles and unwavering spirit of the civil rights movement are fiercely yet sometimes mundanely showcased, and the raw emotion and physicality inherent to it is not lost. Cole's art serves as a powerful testament to the ongoing struggle for equality, reminding us that the fight for social and artistic liberation are inextricably linked.

TRESTON SANDERS
CURATOR, ARTS PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
GLOBAL CAMPUS

“Ev’ry Round Goes Higher, Higher”: Kevin Cole at the Intersection of Synthesis, Nature, Spirituality, and Activism

MELANEE C. HARVEY, PHD
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, HOWARD UNIVERSITY

His work is ritualistic. It is distinct and close to a transitional form of Art. Calligraphy and the look of hand-made are wonderfully present like Bob Thompson’s work. The works unite in their separation to form the whole. . . . [His] works have a strong pre-abstract language. They are environmental and economical. . . . The images are carved from life and decisions. . . . His real influences are African American and Southern.¹

—SAM GILLIAM

For more than four decades, Kevin Cole has forged a signature style defined by his movement between sculptural volume and painterly texture. In her definitive essay entitled “From the Book of Genesis to *A Knock at Midnight*,” Julie McGee characterized the arc of Cole’s career in her analysis of the first work in the *Jacob’s Ladder* series, *Do Lord Remember Me* (2002), with these words: “*Jacob’s Ladder* is an apt metaphor for artist Kevin Cole’s artistic trajectory: that is one of continual striving toward ascendance.”² As Cole developed his aesthetic practice of employing color, value, and volume to engage viewers, he continued to mine foundational aspects of African American southern culture. Sam Gilliam recognized the multifaceted components of Cole’s historical and cultural notations, assembled to create new forms through abstraction that often mimic the complexities of life. Cole has masterfully integrated the aesthetic lessons of his former teachers and mentors to establish a unique visual vocabulary that is shaped by Black religious traditions as well as the natural and cultural landscapes of the American South.

Cole’s art documents the sociopolitical tenor of the post–civil rights era and presents the possibility of hope, actualization of equality, and spiritual transcendence. The abstract constructions that emerge from the artist’s studio extend the cultural work of African American musical spiritual traditions, refiguring them to address contemporary circumstance. Cole augments the cultural tools of his ancestors, giving visual form to strategies that sustain and advance the individual and the collective whole. A visual testament to the spiritual lyric “Ev’ry round goes higher, higher,” Cole’s oeuvre demonstrates the dynamism at the core of his abstraction, which consistently moves between spiritual introspection and social justice activism toward transcendence.

Cole has maintained a commitment to mixed-media compositions throughout his career, placing him in a rich lineage of African American artists who have experimented with “collage aesthetics,” such as Romare Bearden and Benny Andrews.³ Religious scholar Anthony Pinn emphasizes the catalytic potential of collage, in a manner that can be extended to Cole’s sculptural practice. Interpreting Bearden’s collage practice, Pinn asserts, “In this way, the purpose of ‘things’ is recast, reshaped, and



Fig. 1. *Ray, Ray Did Graduate*, 1984, mixed media on wood, 59 x 23 x 2 inches. Collection of the artist

magnified. These things—scraps of paper, pieces of wood, letters, and so forth—have their thingliness transformed and used to mirror other and deeper realities.” Pinn further explains, “Using these captured and manipulated elements, he pushes viewers to confront the commonalities of human experiences as they also observe the spaces of activity marking African American experiences within space and time.”⁴

Throughout his career, Cole has been concerned with using the legible “thingliness” of African American experiences, ranging from his 1980s reflections on the experiences of young Black men, such as *Ray, Ray Did Graduate* (fig. 1), to his signature abstract provocations clad in the historic cultural

lexicon of his African American forbears. In this way, Cole serves as a transitional figure in the history of African American art active in distilling and transforming Black southern cultural idioms.

This essay interprets Kevin Cole’s artworks as sites of intervention that use dynamic design to promote themes of personal introspection and collective action. Cole has consistently voiced his intention to interrupt the status quo of inequality and promote social justice. This analysis begins by examining Cole’s early work from the 1980s and early 1990s as sites of synthesis, revealing influence from former instructors to artist mentors such as John Miller Howard (1908–1980), Henri Linton (1944–) and Tarrence Corbin (1946–2010). His development from figuration to abstraction reveals his desire to build form through accumulation and projection. This essay proceeds to consider Cole’s engagement with histories of the American South across the natural and built environments. His sculptural forms are intended to visually mark and transfigure southern space by centering African American cultural epistemologies or ways of understanding in his art. I conclude by discussing his recent activist art, which enacts the urgent work of recording and protesting renewed efforts to limit African American voting rights.

Synthesis of Influences

As an artist, Cole is the product of a rich tapestry of African American artists who pushed the boundaries of modernism with compositional experimentation. His artworks from the 1980s and 1990s reflect his sustained interaction with Black artistic communities. His first step into this community occurred during his undergraduate art studies at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB), a historically Black institution, from 1978 to 1981. Here, Cole gained entry to a local and regional community of African American artists forged by John M. Howard, founder of the art department at UAPB, and his colleague Henri Linton. Cole established his affinity for expressionistic forms during his coursework with Howard. Howard’s studies with Hale Woodruff at Atlanta University and later New York University equipped him with modernist sensibilities, evident in paintings like *Still Life with Fruit* (1967).⁵ This painting documents a clear mastery of color and dynamic compositional space, design elements that Cole would



Fig. 2. John M. Howard, *Madonna and Child*, 1946, woodcut, 15 x 12 inches. Collection of Kevin Cole

advance in his paintings and sculptures during the 1980s and 1990s. Cole maintains possession of a print by Howard entitled *Madonna and Child* (fig. 2) as a visual charge to push the boundaries in rendering space. For example, the abstract section of this print, just to the left, above the Madonna's head, is defined by the interplay of pattern and overlapping shapes. This aspect of *Madonna and Child* prefigures the design sensibilities of fracturing and reshaping space at the core of Cole's signature style.

Cole earned a Master of Arts in painting from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1983 and a Master of Fine Arts in drawing from Northern Illinois University in 1985. As an undergraduate and graduate student, Cole worked primarily in figuration. His paintings, such as *When Dreams Are Interrupted* (1984) and *Nobody Knows the Trouble I See* (fig. 3), indicate an interest in defining compositional space with expressive elongated figures. Linton, Cole's undergraduate drawing professor, created paintings that used emotion-laden figures in dense domestic interiors to comment on the human condition. For example, Linton's award-winning



Fig. 3. *Nobody Knows the Trouble I See*, 1984, mixed media on wood, 52 x 38 x 3 inches. Courtesy of Dr. Lee and Delores Shelton (Atlanta, Georgia)

painting *Easy for One, Hard for Two* (see p. 73) suggests his interest in constructing compositional space through interplays of patterns.⁶ Painterly qualities are points of emphasis across art by Linton and Cole. The emotive posture of Linton's visual protagonist and the sensitive rendering of a blue shirt hanging across the back of a chair in *Easy for One, Hard for Two* echoes Cole's young male subject in *Nobody Knows the Trouble I See*.

Art historians, including Ann Gibson and Julie McGee, have analyzed the mentorship and influence of Tarrence Corbin, the art faculty member at UAPB who arguably had the most significant impact on Cole's artistic maturation.⁷ Comparing Corbin's *Serious Play* (fig. 4) and Cole's *Sweet Hour of Prayer* (fig. 5) from the *Color of Music* series illuminates their shared exploration of shape, color, and value to push the boundaries of their respective art mediums. The seeds of compositional tension and expansive design that challenge two-dimensional space in *Serious Play* blossom in Cole's creative practice. Corbin's artist statement from the UAPB faculty exhibition of 1980 conveys the shared artistic and philosophical pursuit

of the two artists. Corbin stated, "The evolution of my work has continued the exploration of the dichotomy between order and chaos, harmony and disharmony, unity and disunity, existing in the external and internal world of my own consciousness. . . . It is through the extended boundaries of complexity that I search for simplicity and wholeness of order."⁸ Cole advanced these ideas throughout and beyond his graduate studies.

Cole's subject matter in the 1980s and 1990s reflects a desire to address the individual circumstance to the collective cultural whole. Compositions from 1992 cannot be divorced from the public discussions around police brutality and anti-Black violence in the wake of the Rodney King arrest and trial. On April 3, 1991, Rodney King and his friend were brutally beaten by Los Angeles policemen after a traffic stop. This event, documented on a video recording, amplified a long history of anti-Black violence circulated through popular media and technologies. *Sweet Hour of Prayer* and *Kinda Blue* (fig. 6) construct confined space through rigid convoluted ribbons.



Fig. 5. *Sweet Hour of Prayer*, *Color of Music* series, 1992, mixed media, 62 x 47 inches. Collection of the artist

Cole subverts the spatial logic of the moment that renders African Americans vulnerable in public spaces by crafting organic forms that suggest a movement beyond the confines of the paper—beyond the persistence of inequality in America.

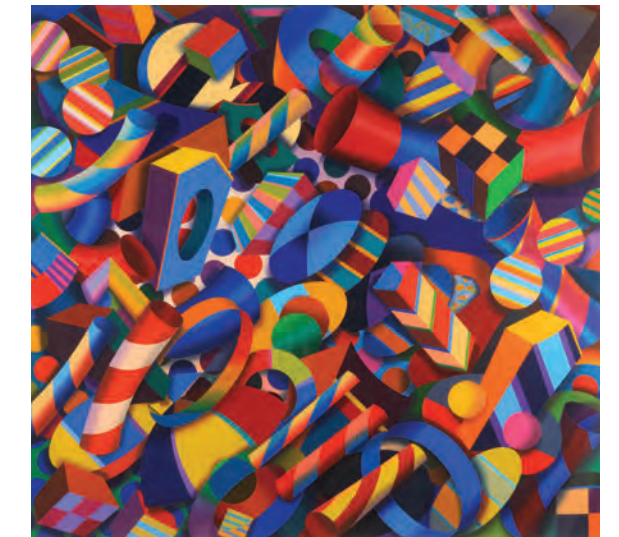


Fig. 4. Tarrence Corbin, *Serious Play*, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 70 x 71 inches. Courtesy of the David C. Driskell Center, Gift of Ms. Lisa Phillips Beysiegel



Fig. 6. *Kinda Blue*, 1992, mixed media on paper, 62 x 42 inches. Courtesy of Arthur and Jay Richardson (Atlanta, Georgia)

By the 1990s, Cole had established deep professional art roots in the Atlanta metropolitan area. His position as a southern-born artist, committed to creating art in the southern United States, takes on particular significance as he evolved into a leading voice of a new artistic generation that shaped this region. For example, Cole provided Atlanta with an image of the capital city as a multicultural community in his mural for the 1996 Olympic Games (fig. 7). His consistent productivity demonstrates the usefulness of existing at the intersection of abstraction and Black cultural traditions.

In Place: Kevin Cole and the American South

Cole has crafted a creative enclave situated 17 miles outside downtown Atlanta that facilitates the synthesis between creative expression, nature, and spirituality. Cole's fellow AfriCOBRA (African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists) members James Phillips and Akili Ron Anderson brought Cole's studio complex to my attention in 2016 as they shared their memories of AfriCOBRA meetings there. Several generations of artists and cultural workers have communed with

Cole at this generative site that facilitates intellectual exchange, creativity, and artistic community. Three buildings at the edge of a four-acre property house his artist studios and wood and metal shop, as well as a fabrication space for large-scale work.⁹ Cole's studio sits at the intersection of nature's creative order and man's aesthetic innovation.

The natural and cultural landscapes of the American South loom prominently in the production and interpretation of Cole's art. The artist described his daily routine:

I like nature. I like being in the woods. I walk at least three miles a day just to stay healthy. But at the same time, I like the idea of thinking while I'm in nature. You know, being able to stand out and look. That's something Sam [Gilliam] always talked about: how landscape makes abstract painting work. Nature provides the space to look at what's happening, socially and politically.¹⁰

Cole understands this environment as a central site that initiates his dialogic engagement through visual arts. His words recall the perspective of his undergraduate sculpture professor from UAPB, Earnest J. Davidson Jr. (1946–2006). Cole displays in one of his studio spaces a faculty exhibition poster (fig. 8) from his undergraduate days that bears this statement from Davidson:

"As a sculptor, there are many shapes in nature that I would like to re-define in relationship to my attitudes about form, structure and three-dimensionality. I am more concerned about the essence of form and structure using nature as my stimulus."¹¹ For Cole



Left to right: Fig. 7. *The Coca-Cola Centennial Olympic Games Mural*, 1996, 15 stories. Commission for the 1996 Olympic Games (Atlanta, Georgia); Fig 8. University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff Faculty Exhibition Poster, 1980, Collection of Kevin Cole



and his former instructor, nature is the impetus for experimentation and aesthetic revelation. Cole's daily communion with nature also facilitates a reflection on his core philosophies and the lessons from artistic ancestors that guided his development.

The prominence of natural landscapes extends to the popular interpretations of Cole's signature compositions, such as *Do Lord Remember Me I* (fig. 9) from the *Jacob's Ladder* series. When Cole was a young adult, his grandfather, Samuel Cole Sr., transformed the southern landscape into a metaphorical universe to explain the history of lynching as a racist social threat to deter African American voting. Samuel Cole used trees as social symbols and utilized the southern ground as canvas to draw forms in the soil to convey spatial histories of oppression. In the artist's symbolic universe, the natural forms of the South are punctuated by contemporary everyday forms such as ties and ladders, creating what art historian Ann Gibson describes as a "site of memory."¹²

Cole's understanding of his environment as historical source and creative force is echoed by other African American artists and philosophers. For example, bell hooks shares her experience of learning from the southern natural landscape in her familial recollections of her home state, Kentucky, in her 2009 publication *Belonging: A Culture of Place*. She notes:

From him [Daddy Jerry], I learned to see nature, our natural environment as a force caring for the exploited and oppressed black folk living in the culture of white supremacy. Nature was there to teach the limitation of humankind, white and black. Nature was there to show us god, to give us the mystery and the promise. These were Daddy Jerry's lessons to me, as he lifted me onto a mule, as we walked the rows and rows of planted crops talking together.¹³

In concert with southern-born cultural workers, Cole extends a rich tradition of southern-born African American artists who employ nature and this cultural landscape to anchor their artistic practice. This lineage of artist includes modernists like William H. Johnson, Eldzier Cortor, and Romare Bearden, as well as conceptual artists like Beverly Buchanan.¹⁴ Artworks such as *Uncharted Waters I* (2020) are emblematic of Cole's signature style of chromatic, expressive projecting forms. His aesthetic

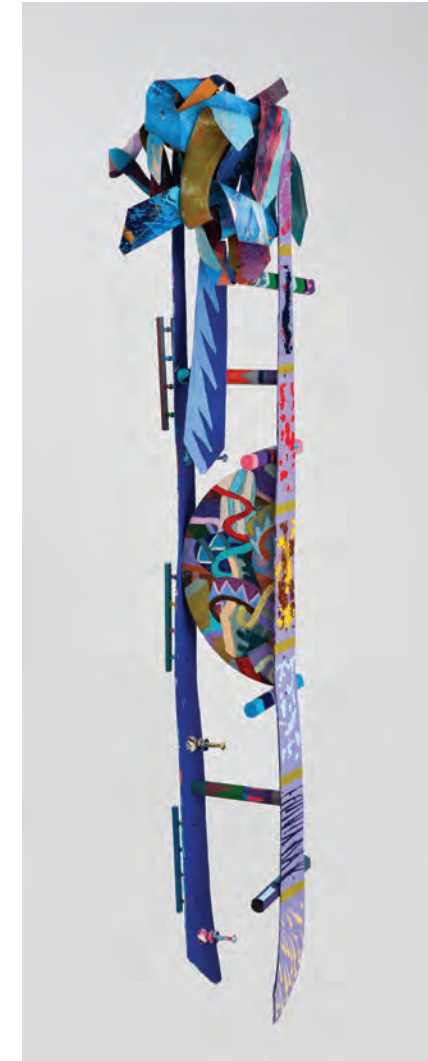


Fig. 9. *Do Lord Remember Me I*, *Jacob's Ladder* series, 2009, mixed media, 108 x 38 x 28 inches. Collection of the artist

resonates with southern-based contemporaries like Floyd Newsom and Suzanne Jackson, as they all demonstrate an interest in bringing together seemingly discordant design elements and objects to construct new forms that challenge viewers.¹⁵

Sites of Revelation

Religion and spirituality are recurring themes that unite Cole's explorations in abstraction. He directly addressed this facet of his art, noting, "My faith, you know, you wake up in the morning time and thank God for waking up. You know everybody is in your life for a season. That's something I strongly believe in."¹⁶ Cole shared this in our discussions of a series of losses he endured over the past few years, including



Above: Fig. 10. *Turning Faith into Hope*, c. 1993, mixed media on paper, 53 x 39 inches. UMGC Permanent Collection, International Collection. Right: Fig. 11. *Do Lord Remember Me III*, *Jacob's Ladder* series, 2009, mixed media, 108 x 38 x 28 inches. Collection of the artist



artist friends Moe Brooker (1940–2022), Larry Walker (1935–2023), and Radcliffe Bailey (1968–2023), as well as fellow AfriCOBRA members Nelson Stevens (1938–2022), Michael D. Harris (1948–2022), and Frank Smith (1935–2023). Cole anchors his constructions in the hope and inspiration he finds in his practice of Christianity. Artworks such as *Turning Faith into Hope* (fig. 10) and *Increase Risk with Emotional Faith* (2008) document his personal religious journey. The convoluted movement, dense construction, and voluminous projection inherent to these compositions inspire optimism, confidence in the future, and belief in the impossible.

Cole does not focus on proselytization. Instead, he builds forms that utilize “religion as a technology . . . [and] method of interrogation and exposure.”¹⁷ He reminds viewers of the symbolic universe of African American spirituals as his source, thus centering Black religious histories forged in the American South. African American spirituals often expound on biblical scripture.¹⁸ *Do Lord Remember Me III* (fig. 11)

and *Do Lord Remember Me V* (2010) extend Cole’s *Jacob’s Ladder* series, which he began in 2002 as a memorial series to influential figures in his life. Julie McGee links this series to the biblical story in Genesis 28:12–19 of Jacob’s dream of a ladder ascending to heaven. *Do Lord Remember Me III* and *Do Lord Remember Me V* operate together to mark the transition of Cole’s artistic mentor Tarrence Corbin. The asymmetrical structures suggest abundance and harmony as the culmination of spiritual ascension.¹⁹ Echoing the ritualistic qualities noted in the epigraph, these freestanding sculptures, measuring almost nine feet in height, compel viewers to walk around them to survey their surface qualities. The transition from the chromatic interplay of *Do Lord Remember Me III* to the monochromatic unity of *Do Lord Remember Me V* mark the final months of Corbin’s life. *Do Lord Remember Me V*, in all the luminous qualities of the textured aluminum, signals Corbin’s transitioning beyond this earthly life to the abundance of eternal life. Across the *Jacob’s Ladder* series, Cole seeks to initiate a period of inspection

in the viewer that develops into reflection. These sculptures put forth questions to the viewer, including, Who do you remember? and Who do you wish to remember you? These queries, which arise from African American Christian expressions, pose universal questions concerning one’s relationship to community.

Cole found a kindred spirit in Philadelphia-based painter Moe Brooker, as they shared an interest in abstraction and spirituality. The two Brooker artworks in Cole’s personal art collection are a testament to their generative exchanges.²⁰ Art historian Nikki Greene offers a fitting interpretation of Brooker’s painting practice that conveys the centrality of spirituality in abstraction upheld by Brooker and Cole. She asserts:

Regardless of the viewer’s receptivity to a Christian God, Brooker knows such a being exists for him and that his paintings should elicit a “sacred gaze.” . . . Therefore, when viewing Brooker’s paintings, one senses an ability to metaphorically dive into various layers of blocks and patterns of bright colors and shapes within a simultaneously vast and confined space.²¹

Cole continues to make two-dimensional and three-dimensional art that pushes beyond the boundaries of his signature compositional forms. In *When Promises Become Blessings I* (fig. 12) and *Resting on Blessings* (2022), the flat diagonal plane rises to an interlocking core that takes on three-dimensional volume. Beyond the wall and beyond the two-dimensional picture plane, Cole consistently reminds viewers to believe in the impossible through spiritual reflection that results in revelation.

Sites of Social Justice: Expanding an Activist Symbology

Since his early days as an art student, Cole has ensured that protesting inequality remains at the core of his artistic practice. Early artworks such as *Hidden Struggle* (fig. 13) evidence his interest in addressing social concerns with his art. In this instance, Cole confronts South African apartheid as a form of globally sanctioned systematic racism. With the turn of the 21st century and the persistence of racism in America, Cole amplified the activist tone of his art. By 2011, Cole turned to the sermons of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to gain insight on addressing the long-standing



Fig. 12. *When Promises Become Blessings I*, 2017, etched aluminum, 57 x 29 x 7 inches. Collection of Kerry and C. Betty Davis (Atlanta, Georgia)



Fig. 13. *Hidden Struggle*, 1984, mixed media on wood, 37 x 29 x 3 inches. Collection of Dr. Cynthia Armster (Chicago, Illinois)

tradition of racial discrimination and anti-Black violence. In particular, Cole studied a sermon King delivered from 1958 through 1967 entitled "A Knock at Midnight." King observed:

This midnight in man's external collective life has brought about midnight in his internal individual life. It is midnight in the psychological order. Everywhere there are people who are harrowed by day and haunted by night with paralyzing fears. Deep clouds of anxiety and depression are floating in so many of our mental skies. . . .
 . . . Some will knock who are moving toward the evening of life and are tormented with the fear of death. We must provide them with the bread of faith in immortality, so that they will realize that this earthly life is merely an embryonic prelude to a new awakening and that death is not a period which ends this great sentence of life, but a comma that punctuates it to loftier significance.²²

King's observations continued to ring true for Cole and the African American community as the election of President Barack Obama augmented racist tensions.²³ Cole contrasts the iridescence of *Do Lord Remember Me V* with the black monochromatic qualities of *A Knock at Midnight* (fig. 14). *A Knock at Midnight* gives visual form to a period of racial backlash that seemingly condones anti-Black violence. In the context of the Black Lives Matter movement and in response to the death of Trayvon Martin, Cole returned to reintroduce the human figure in his mixed-media freestanding sculptural installation entitled *But NOT Trayvon!* (fig. 15). As America continued to bear witness to deadly violence inflicted on Black Americans, he reintroduced the American flag as a symbol of critique in his mixed-media composition *Just Us Made in America* (fig. 16), extending a 20th-century art practice exemplified in the modernist art of Jasper Johns and the postmodernist art of Faith Ringgold.



Fig. 14. *A Knock at Midnight*, 2011, embossing on paper, artist's proof, 1/1, 49 x 32 inches. Courtesy of Jenkins Johnson Gallery (New York, New York)



Fig. 15. *But NOT Trayvon!*, 2017, mixed media, 28 x 12 x 12 inches. Collection of the artist



Fig. 16. *Just Us Made in America*, 2020, mixed media, 22 x 17 inches. Collection of Lyndon Perkins (Dekalb, Illinois)



Fig. 17. *How Many Jelly Beans in a Jar?*, *Ballot Box* series, 2022, mixed media on wood, 20 x 10 x 10 inches. Courtesy of Alan and Melanie Smith (Morristown, New Jersey)

Over the past three years, Cole has created a diverse body of art to capture his experience of racism and racial tension in Georgia, a state that became ground zero for protecting African American voting rights in 2016.²⁴ Cole recasts the absentee voting ballot box as a painterly surface. In doing so, he highlights the contradictions between the national aspiration for equal rights and the reality of racially motivated voter discrimination that was taking new form in states across the American South. These sculptures in the *Ballot Box* series, such as *How Many Jelly Beans in a Jar?* (fig. 17) and *Conversation with the Proud Boys* (2002), tell the story of countless African Americans who were denied the right to vote based on intentionally racist voter registration practices. Moreover, *Conversation with the Proud Boys* establishes a historical trajectory from the past into the contemporary moment in Cole's aesthetic confrontation with the white supremacist organization the Proud Boys. Cole extends the documentary aspect of his recent body of protest art in his series *Along Colored Lines II* (fig. 18), as well as his series *Gerrymandering*. Across the graphic hand-colored intaglio prints of the *Along Colored Lines* series and the monumental metallic banners of the



Fig. 18. *Georgia, Along Colored Lines II* series, 2021, hand-colored intaglio, 35¼ x 35¼ inches. Collection of the artist

Gerrymandering series, Cole provides a rich aesthetic account of injustice that persists in the South as well as in battleground voting states such as Michigan.

Conclusion

Cole has created a body of art that reflects African American cultural cycles of endurance and perseverance. His work moves from investigating social issues and posing spiritual solutions to framing life's journey. He is an artist who stands at the intersection of protest and transcendence. The art history of this artist reveals he is indeed an aesthetic force that connects generations of artists and generations of Black creative expression. He continues to remind the world that art created in the American South is on the front line of activism and bears the deepest imprint of African American cultural legacies.

Since 1976, Cole has pursued an artistic trajectory that has led him to create art at the intersection of synthesis, nature, spirituality, and activism. Like many of his fellow AfriCOBRA members, Cole embodies a Sankofa sensibility in his approach to life and creative production. Sankofa is a Ghanaian Akan Adinkra symbol that translates to "go back and fetch it" or "return to your past."²⁵ Reflecting on the past to inform contemporary strategies for the present is a daily aspect of Cole's life. This reflection, punctuated by the wisdom imparted to him by his religious faith, familial patriarchs, artist friends, and mentors, materializes in his dynamic sculptures.

In *Soul Ties That Matter* (fig. 19), his public art commission for the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, Cole juxtaposed the legibility of his horizontal global map with his signature entwined projections. In contrast to the flat, white continental forms, the aluminum construction is animated by the light that floods through the upper registers of windows. In this 55-foot-long sculptural installation, he challenges viewers with a humanistic charge to look beyond geographical boundaries and cultural differences. He directs viewers to focus on the interconnectedness and similarities of the global human experience. The title, *Soul Ties That Matter*, is a directive that human connection is significant and vital to one's well-being. This artwork requires viewers to gaze upward, much like his vertical assemblages, such as the *Jacob's Ladder* series and *Totem* series. These artworks enact the line from the African American spiritual "We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder":



Fig. 19. *Soul Ties That Matter*, 2017, etched aluminum, 240 x 660 x 24 inches. Commission for the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (Atlanta, Georgia)

"Ev'ry round goes higher, higher." The art that is created by Cole at the intersection of synthesis, nature, spirituality, and activism documents a personal and communal pursuit of advancement, elevation, and ascension.

One of the last points of emphasis Cole shared during our 2023 studio visit was the indelible impact Sam Gilliam made on his life. In many ways, Gilliam and Cole were connected through their aesthetic priority of destabilizing traditional approaches to painting and sculpture to illuminate the innovative possibilities in pushing artistic boundaries. Although their mentor-mentee relationship is documented in the exhibition catalog for *Protégé: Sam Gilliam and Kevin Cole* (2011), Gilliam's words continue to provide insight into Cole's aesthetic practice and cultural contributions. As stated in the epigraph of this essay, Gilliam recognized the transformational qualities of Cole's work when he remarked, "It is distinct and close to a transitional form of Art."²⁶ Gilliam's use of the term "transitional" speaks to Cole's ability to transcend the fine art categories of painting and sculpture. But I argue that the term "transitional" also references what is brought about in viewers as they respond to the visual call from Kevin Cole to pursue the avenues of life that lead to humanity's improvement and transcendence.

Notes

¹ "From a Conversation Between Keith Morrison and Sam Gilliam," in *Kevin Cole: Straight from the Soul*, exhibition catalog (Blue Lotus New York, 2012), 61, 64.

² Julie McGee, "From the Book of Genesis to *A Knock at Midnight*," in *Kevin Cole: Straight from the Soul*, 26.

³ Patricia Hills, "Cultural Legacies and the Transformation of the Cubist Collage Aesthetic by Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, and Other African-American Artists," *Studies in the History of Art* 71 (2011): 241.

⁴ Anthony B. Pinn, *Interplay of Things: Religion, Art, and Presence Together* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 137, 146.

⁵ "John M. Howard, 70, Prize-Winning Artist," *Afro-American*, December 20, 1980, 2. Howard founded the art department at UAPB in 1939 after studying with Atlanta artist Hale Woodruff. Linton joined the faculty at UAPB in the late 1960s, helping usher in civil rights protest aesthetics to this HBCU.

⁶ "Alabama Artist Wins Top Prize at A.U. Art Show," *Atlanta Daily*, March 31, 1968, A3; "Mrs. Simon Gets 7th Atlanta Award for Art," *Afro-American*, April 2, 1966, 17.

⁷ Ann Gibson, "Outside the Groove of History: Kevin Cole's and Sam Gilliam's Sites of Memory," in *Protégé: Sam Gilliam and Kevin Cole*, exhibition catalog (Charlotte, NC: Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts and Culture, 2010), 8–9; McGee, "From the Book of Genesis," 26.

⁸ University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff Faculty Exhibition Poster, 1980, collection of Kevin Cole.

⁹ Kevin Cole, interview by Melanee Harvey, November 12, 2023.

¹⁰ Cole interview by Harvey.

¹¹ University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff Faculty Exhibition Poster.

¹² Gibson, "Outside the Groove of History," 9.

¹³ bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 42.

¹⁴ Floyd W. Coleman, "Mama is Calling: The South, Well-spring of Afro-American Visual Culture," 2, n.d., Jeff Donaldson Papers, 1918–2005, bulk 1960s–2005, box 11, folder 22, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁵ Artworks such as Floyd Newsum's *Cow, Fish, and Dog in Landscape* (c. 2010) and Suzanne Jackson's *Deepest Ocean, What We Do Not Know, What Might We See* (2021) exemplify the practice of combining artistic and material forms that revise and redefine the southern United States in alignment with personal and collective histories.

¹⁶ Cole interview by Harvey.

¹⁷ Pinn, *Interplay of Things*, 1.

¹⁸ Vincent L. Wimbush, "Introduction: The Bible as Language-World," in *Ashe to Amen: African Americans and Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leslie King-Hammond, exhibition catalog (New York: Museum of Biblical Art, 2013), 22.

¹⁹ McGee, "From the Book of Genesis," 25–26.

²⁰ Cole interview by Harvey.

²¹ Nikki Greene, "Vibrations in the Soul: Moe Brooker's Sacred Paintings," *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 7.

²² Martin Luther King Jr., "Draft of Chapter VI, 'A Knock at Midnight'" (1962–1963), Martin Luther King Jr. Papers, 1954–1968, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/draft-chapter-vi-knock-midnight>.

²³ Gina Chon et al., "Obama Renews Call for Tighter Gun Control After Nine Killed in Shooting at Historic Black Church: Racial Tension," *Financial Times*, June 19, 2015; Ben Kesling and Mark Peters, "Teen's Shooting Highlights Racial Tension; President Obama Calls for 'Reflection and Understanding,'" *Wall Street Journal*, August 12, 2014, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/teens-shooting-highlights-racial-tension/docview/1552691232/se-2>.

²⁴ "Lawsuit Filed Challenging Georgia's Unlawful Racial Gerrymandering," *New York Beacon*, May 10, 2017: 4, 10; Roger Caldwell, "Gerrymandering and Racketeering Keep the Republicans Winning," *South Florida Times*, September 14, 2023: 6; A. R. Shaw, "Georgia Lawmakers to Draw New Maps After Black Voters Were Intentionally Disenfranchised," *Westside Gazette*, December 7, 2023: 13.

²⁵ Christel N. Temple, "The Emergence of Sankofa Practice in the United States: A Modern History," *Journal of Black Studies* 41, no. 1 (2010): 127–50, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25704098>.

²⁶ "Conversation Between Keith Morrison and Sam Gilliam," 61.



Unforeseen Challenges
2018, mixed media on wood
20 x 78 x 2 inches
Courtesy of Hearne Fine Art
(Little Rock, Arkansas)



PUSHING FORWARD

**Politics, Social Conflict,
and the Racial Divide
in the Art of Kevin Cole**



How Many Jelly Beans in a Jar?
Ballot Box series
 2022, mixed media on wood
 20 x 10 x 10 inches
 Courtesy of Alan and Melanie Smith
 (Morristown, New Jersey)



Aluminum
Ballot Box series
 2021, mixed media on
 wood and aluminum
 20 x 10 x 10 inches
 Courtesy of Hearne Fine Art
 (Little Rock, Arkansas)



Black to the Future
Ballot Box series
 2021, mixed media on wood
 20 x 10 x 10 inches
 Collection of the artist



Monk Composition #19
1994, mixed media on wood
43 x 47 x 3 inches
Courtesy of Jenkins Johnson Gallery
(San Francisco, California)



Blue Skies with Purple Dreams
Color of Music series
1992, mixed media on paper
42 x 62 inches
Courtesy of Jenkins Johnson Gallery
(San Francisco, California)



The Struggle of the Families
Signs of the Times series
 1988, mixed media on canvas
 73 x 77 inches
 Courtesy of Hearne Fine Art
 (Little Rock, Arkansas)



Working People
Signs of the Times series
 1989, charcoal on paper
 48 x 48 inches
 Collection of the artist



My Hats
1978, acrylic on canvas
26 x 86 inches
Collection of the artist



Mother
1976, acrylic on canvas
32 x 26 inches
Collection of the artist



Nick's Jacket I
1979, oil on canvas
30 x 24 inches
Courtesy of Skyler Cole
(Atlanta, Georgia)



Nobody Knows the Trouble I See
1984, mixed media on wood
52 x 38 x 3 inches
Courtesy of Dr. Lee and Delores Shelton
(Atlanta, Georgia)



A Child's View
1986, mixed media on wood
51 x 44 x 4 inches
Courtesy of Eric and Klinda Nelums
(Atlanta, Georgia)



Shared Visions with Shared Blessings
2020, etched aluminum
20 x 38 x 5 inches
Courtesy of Wright and Kathy
Lassiter III (Alamo, California)



Turning Faith into Hope
c. 1993, mixed media on paper
53 x 39 inches
UMGC Permanent Collection
International Collection



Do Lord Remember Me IV
Jacob's Ladder series
2010, etched aluminum
108 x 47 x 33 inches
Courtesy of Jenkins Johnson Gallery
(San Francisco, California)



Remembering Elizabeth Catlett
Jacob's Ladder series, 2012
mixed media, 108 x 38 x 28 inches
Collection of the artist



When Your Heart Is Not in It I
 2020, mixed media on wood
 21 x 27 x 6 inches
 Private collection



Watching Shadows Dream I, 2011, embossing collage, 1/1, 32 x 48 inches
 Collection of Brenda and Larry Thompson (Atlanta, Georgia)



Heartbeat Away IV, 2022, mixed media on paper, 12 x 24 x 2 inches
 Courtesy of Jason Tinsley (Detroit, Michigan)



When Promises Become Blessings I
2017, etched aluminum
57 x 29 x 7 inches
Collection of Kerry and C. Betty Davis
(Atlanta, Georgia)



Totem for Ornette Coleman
Totem series
2016, mixed media on wood
52 x 8 x 7 inches
Courtesy of Raymond and Lucy Allen
(Atlanta, Georgia)



Stressful Challenges
Stuck in the Middle series
2016, mixed media on wood
36 x 38 x 2 inches
Courtesy of Kraige and Crystal Tyler
(Grayson, Georgia)



No Gifts, No Surprises
2013, mixed media on wood
23 x 28 x 13 inches
Courtesy of Robert and Valerie Mallet
(McLean, Virginia)



Arkansas
Along Colored Lines series
2021, hand-colored intaglio
33 x 33 inches
Courtesy of Hearne Fine Art
(Little Rock, Arkansas)



Georgia
Along Colored Lines II series
2021, hand-colored intaglio
35½ x 35½ inches
Collection of the artist



Hopes with Opportunities I
2016, mixed media on wood
44 x 25 x 6 inches
Courtesy of the Mosaic Templars
Cultural Center
(Little Rock, Arkansas)



Turning Situations into Blessings
2022, etched aluminum and copper
31 x 23 x 8 inches
Collection of Jacob Hall
(Little Rock, Arkansas)



Danci with Boogaloo Beat I for TC
2009–2010, mixed media on paper
36 x 61 inches
Collection of the artist



Ray, Ray Did Graduate
1984, mixed media on wood
59 x 23 x 2 inches
Collection of the artist



When Dreams Are Interrupted
1984, mixed media on wood
73 x 18 x 2 inches
Collection of the artist



Hidden Struggle
1984, mixed media on wood
37 x 29 x 3 inches
Collection of Dr. Cynthia Armster
(Chicago, Illinois)



As We Speak
Flag series
1989, charcoal on paper
52 x 72 inches
Private collection



Lesson That Leads to Blessing I
2018, relief printing on paper
edition 4/15
50 x 41 inches
Collection of the artist



Faith Is All I Need Along the Way
2019, mixed media on paper
51 x 42 inches
Collection of Moses and Marcia Elam
(Atlanta, Georgia)



Old One, New One
1976, colored pencil on paper
30 x 25 inches
Collection of the artist



Fall
2008, colored pencil on paper
22 x 28 inches
Collection of the artist



North Carolina
Creating Obstacles series
2020, etched aluminum
maquette, 27 x 11 x 5 inches
Collection of the artist



Florida
Creating Obstacles series
2020, etched aluminum
maquette, 27 x 11 x 5 inches
Collection of the artist



Kinda Blue
1992, mixed media on paper
62 x 42 inches
Courtesy of Arthur and Jay Richardson
(Atlanta, Georgia)



3 A.M. Wings for TC
2009, mixed media on wood
61 x 81 x 8 inches
Collection of the artist



Born in the USA
Signs of the Times series
1990, charcoal on paper
63 x 48 inches
Collection of the artist



Still Life #3
1976, colored pencil on paper
35 x 35 inches
Collection of the artist



A Knock at Midnight
2011, embossing on paper
artist's proof, 1/1
49 x 32 inches
Courtesy of Jenkins Johnson Gallery
(New York, New York)



Just Us Made in America
2020, mixed media
22 x 17 inches
Collection of Lyndon Perkins
(Dekalb, Illinois)



This Little Light of Mine I
 Blanket series
 2014, etched copper
 62 x 18 x 7 inches
 Collection of the artist



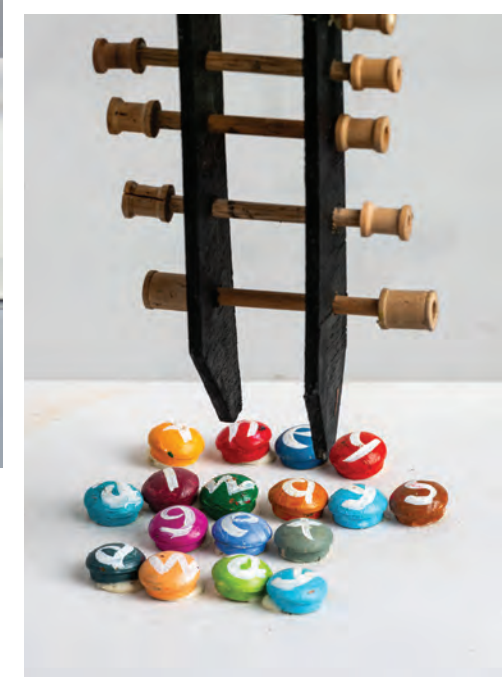
Heaven Is Calling I, Blanket series, 2016
 mixed media on wood, 60 x 12 x 3 inches
 Collection of Dennis and Matoka Forbes
 (Kensington, Maryland)



Choice Blessing, Blanket series, 2014
 etched aluminum, 60 x 18 x 7 inches
 Collection of the artist



But NOT Trayvon!
 2017, mixed media
 28 x 12 x 12 inches
 Collection of the artist



But NOT Trayvon!, detail



No, You Can't Come Over
Stuck in the Middle series
 2017, mixed media on wood
 diptych, 72 x 96 x 3 inches
 Collection of the artist



Chasing Laughter
2010, aluminum and copper
52 x 20 x 11 inches
UMGC Permanent Collection
International Collection



Looking to Heaven for Answers I
Fragments of Frozen series
2007, mixed media
32½ x 22½ x 3 inches
Collection of Charles Baker
(Capitol Heights, Maryland)

Checklist of Works

3 A.M. Wings for TC
2009, mixed media on wood
61 x 81 x 8 inches
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2021, mixed media on wood and aluminum
20 x 10 x 10 inches
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Collection of the artist

Kevin E. Cole
Artist/Educator

B. 1960, PINE BLUFF, ARKANSAS

Education

1985 MFA, Drawing, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois

1983 MA, Art Education/Painting, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Illinois

1981 BS, Art Education, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Arkansas

Selected Visiting Artist Residencies, Lectures, Symposiums, and Panels

2024 Distinguished Laureate Lecture Series XII, Arkansas Black Hall of Fame, Little Rock, Arkansas

2023, 2024 Visiting Artist, Prince of Peace Catholic School, Clinton, Iowa

2022 Visiting Artist, Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia

2019 Juror, *Delta Exhibition*, Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, Arkansas

2018 Visiting Artist, Chautauqua Institution for the Arts, Chautauqua, New York

2016 Visiting Artist, North Carolina Central University, Durham, North Carolina

2014 Visiting Artist, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah

2012 Lecture, Arts & Science Center for Southeast Arkansas, Pine Bluff, Arkansas

2004–2013 Table Leader, AP Studio Art, Education Testing Association, Princeton, New Jersey

2010 Performing Race in African American Visual Culture Symposium, David C. Driskell Center, University of Maryland, College Park

2008–2012 Development Committee for the College Board, New York, New York

2008–2011 Juror, *National African American Art Exhibition*, Louisville, Kentucky

2008 Visiting Artist, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware



2007 Panelist, "Beyond Sculpture," New York University, New York, New York

2007 Keynote Speaker, Florida Art Education Association, Orlando, Florida

Selected Public Art Projects

Arts & Science Center for Southeast Arkansas, Pine Bluff, Arkansas

Brigitte Harris Cancer Pavilion at the Henry Ford Health Institute, Detroit, Michigan

Charlottesville-Albemarle Airport, Charlottesville, Virginia

City Hall, Atlanta, Georgia

Coca-Cola Centennial Olympic Games Mural, 1996 Olympic Games, Atlanta, Georgia

ESPN Zone at Super Bowl XXXIV (2000), Atlanta, Georgia

Georgia International Convention Center, College Park, Georgia

Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia

Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, Atlanta, Georgia

Historic Arkansas Museum, Little Rock, Arkansas

P.A.R.K. (Positive Atmosphere Reaches Kids), Little Rock, Arkansas

Studioplex, Atlanta, Georgia

United Way of Greater, Atlanta, Georgia

Washington Park Natatorium, Atlanta, Georgia

Selected Public Collections

Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, Ohio

Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan

Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts and Culture, Charlotte, North Carolina

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia

Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Georgia

National Museum of African American History and Culture, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

North Carolina Central University Art Museum, Durham, North Carolina

Ogden Museum of Southern Art, New Orleans, Louisiana

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

St. Louis University Museum of Art, St. Louis, Missouri

Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, Florida

William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum, Little Rock, Arkansas

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

Selected Awards, Fellowships, and Grants

2023

Notable Georgian, *Georgian Trend Magazine*

2022

Working Artist Fellowship, Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, Atlanta, Georgia

"Kevin Cole Day" Proclamation, February 1, 2022, City of South Fulton, Georgia

2020

Governor's Award for the Arts and Humanities, Atlanta, Georgia

Larry D. and Brenda A. Thompson Award, Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia

2019

Nexus Award, Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, Georgia

2018

Arkansas Black Hall of Fame Induction

2017

30th Anniversary Chancellor's Award, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

2014

Merit Award, *LaGrange National XXVIII*, LaGrange Museum of Art, LaGrange, Georgia

2013

Honoree, National Alumni Hall of Fame, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Woodruff Foundation Leadership in the Arts Fellowship, Atlanta, Georgia

2011

First Prize, *Georgia Artists: A Juried Exhibit*, Abernathy Art Center, Atlanta, Georgia

David C. Driskell Fellowship, Experimental Printmaking Institute Workshop, Lafayette, Pennsylvania

2010

National Art Education Association Fellowship, Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Snowmass Village, Colorado

2008

Semifinalist, National Secondary Art Educator of the Year, National Art Education Association

2007

Sandtown Foundation Grant, Atlanta, Georgia

Interview, *The HistoryMakers*, Chicago, IL

2006

Honorary Chairman, Youth Art Month, Georgia Art Education Association

2005

Merit Award, *Madison National Juried Exhibition*, Madison, Georgia

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2024

Where Do We Go from Here? Part III: Exploring Gerrymandering and Voting, Tubman African American Museum, Macon, Georgia

2023

Where Do We Go from Here? Part II, Hearne Fine Art, Little Rock, Arkansas

2022

Where Do We Go from Here?, Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, Atlanta, Georgia

2020

Soul Ties, Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia

2019

All Tied Up in Politics, Institute 93B, New York, New York

2018

Along Colored Lines, Marta Hewett Gallery, Cincinnati, Ohio

Danci with Color, Nicole Longnecker Gallery, Houston, Texas

2017

Conversation with My Past, Brenau University, Gainesville, Georgia

2016

If Colors Could Speak, North Carolina Central University Art Museum, Durham, North Carolina

Selected Group Exhibitions

2023

We Stand Together, National Alliance of Artists from Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Shanghai Cultural Center, Shanghai, China

2022

Rituals and Remembrance . . . We Will Understand It Better By and By: Romare Bearden, Lillian Blades, Kevin Cole, and Faith Ringgold, September Gray Fine Art Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia

2019

[Un]Common Collections: Selections from Fifteen Collectors, David C Driskell Center, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland (invitational)

50 Years of AfriCOBRA, Stella Jones Gallery, New Orleans, Louisiana

2019 Atlanta Biennial: A Thousand Tomorrows, Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, Georgia (invitational)

Color and Form: Kevin Cole and Jeffery Paclipan, Hathaway Contemporary Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia

2018

Respect: Celebrating 50 Years of AfriCOBRA, Mosaic Templars Cultural Center, Little Rock, Arkansas

AfriCOBRA: The Evolution of a Movement, Gallerie Myrtis, Baltimore, Maryland

AfriCOBRA: Now, Kravets Wehby Gallery, New York, New York

2017

Constructing Identity: Petrucci Family Foundation Collection of African-American Art, Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon

2016

AfriCOBRA NOW: Works on Paper, Hearne Fine Art, Little Rock, Arkansas

2015

White Linen Nights, Thelma Harris Art Gallery, Oakland, California

2014

Living Off the Wall, 10th Street Gallery, St. Louis, Missouri

Traditions Redefined: The Larry and Brenda Thompson Collection of African American Art, St. Louis University Museum of Art, St. Louis, Missouri (traveling exhibition organized by David C. Driskell Center)

LaGrange National XXVIII, LaGrange Museum of Art, LaGrange, Georgia

2013

Kevin Cole: Straight from the Soul—25 Years in the Making, curated by Dr. Julie McGee, Weston Art Gallery, Cincinnati, Ohio (traveling exhibition)

Selected Bibliography

Lia Kizilbash Gillet, "Kevin Cole, M.F.A. '85: From Childhood Art Therapy to the Smithsonian," Northern Illinois University Alumni Association, April 8, 2024.

D. Amari Jackson, "The Tragic Beauty of Kevin Cole," *Black Art in America*, August 16, 2022.

Natasha Gural, "Artist Kevin Cole Depicts Complexities of the Black Experience Through Large-Scale Multi-Media Works That Re-Examine U.S. History," *Forbes*, January 6, 2022.

Ellis Widner, "A Different Perspective," *Arkansas Democrat & Gazette*, May 12, 2019.

Kirby Davis, "Cole to Lecture on How Art, Teaching Careers Are Connected," *Chautauqua Daily*, July 27, 2018.

Nadja Sayej, "AfriCOBRA: The Collective That Helped Shape the Black Arts Movement," *The Guardian*, June 15, 2018.

Richard Carter, "ArtFest 2019 Featuring Visual Artist Kevin Cole," *Times Record News*, June 15, 2018.

Courtney Lawson, "Celebrating and Moving Forward," *Northern NOW*, Fall 2016.

Blue Greenberg, "NCCU Exhibition Abstract Blaze of Color," *Herald Sun*, September 18, 2016.

Leslie Newell Peacock, "Black (Artists) Power 'Here' in Pine Bluff," *Arkansas Times*, June 23, 2016.

Ruth Meyer, "The Artist Life Profile: Kevin Cole, Straight from the Soul," *Artist's Magazine*, September 2013.

Christopher Hoeting, "Straight from the Soul," *AEQAI*, January 20, 2013.

Kathy Schwartz, "Kevin Cole and the Ties That Bind," *Cincinnati CityBeat*, December 19, 2012.

Lee Raudanis, "Six Educators Quietly Making a Difference," *PAGE Magazine*, January/February 2012.

Archie Hearne, *Collaborations: Two Decades of African American Art—Hearne Fine Art 1988–2008*. Blue Lotus New York, 2008.

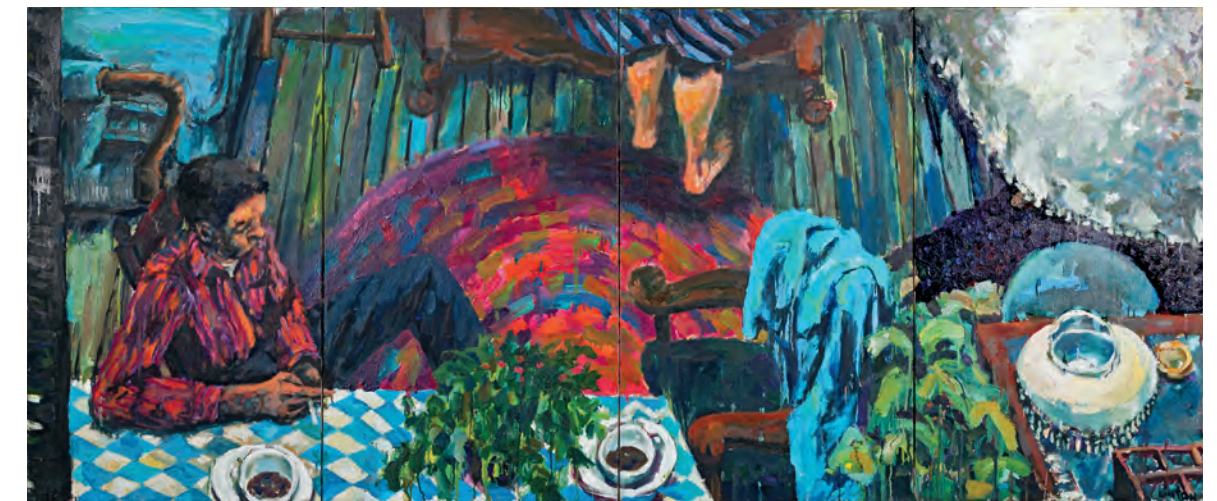
Dennis Forbes, *Studios and Workspaces of Black American Artists*, 2008.

Sean Drakes, "Artistic Expression," *Black Enterprise*, September 2008.

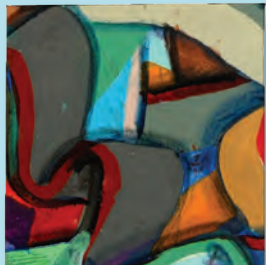
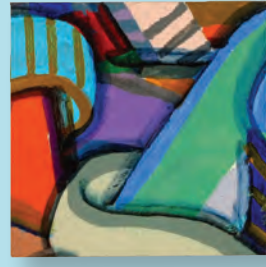
Cathy Fox, "Things Old, New" *Atlanta Journal & Constitution*, August 12, 2005.

Kendra Story, "Sculptors Use Their Hands and Hear to Create Timeless Pieces" *Upscale Magazine*, April 2005.

Allan L. Edmunds, ed. *Three Decades of American Printmaking: The Brandywine Workshop Collection*. 2004.



Henri Linton, *Easy for One, Hard for Two*, 1965, oil on canvas, 33 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 80 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches. Courtesy of Clark Atlanta University Art Museum, Atlanta Art Annuals



Jam'n on a Half Note, 2007
Collection of Brenda and
Larry Thompson
(Sea Island, Georgia)

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COMMISSIONED ARTWORKS



Nine Banners of Wisdom, 2003, Washington Park Natatorium (Atlanta, Georgia)



Shared Passions, 2022, Collection of George and Esohe Galbreath (Atlanta, Georgia)



Above: *Moving Forward*, 2014, Collection of Kenneth and
Cynthia Prince (Stone Mountain, Georgia); Left: *Colorless Dreams III*,
2013, Commission for the 50th Anniversary of the Freedom Riders
by the Alabama Historical Commission (Montgomery, Alabama)



The Daily Agenda
Signs of the Times series
1989, Atlanta City Hall
(Atlanta, Georgia)



Heaven Knows, 2014
Collection of Dr. Dameon
and Kim Fisher
(Atlanta, Georgia)

ABOUT UMGC

University of Maryland Global Campus was founded more than 75 years ago specifically to serve the higher education needs of working adults and military servicemembers. Today, UMGC is the largest provider of postsecondary education in Maryland and continues its global tradition with online and hybrid courses, more than 175 classroom and service locations worldwide, and more than 135 degrees and certificates backed by the reputation of a state university and the University System of Maryland. For more information, visit umgc.edu.

ABOUT THE ARTS PROGRAM AT UMGC

Since 1978, UMGC has proudly shown works from a large collection of international and Maryland artists at its headquarters in Adelphi, Maryland, a few miles from the nation's capital. Through its Arts Program, the university provides a prestigious and wide-ranging forum for emerging and established artists and brings art to the community through special exhibitions and its own collections, which have grown to include more than 2,900 pieces of art.

Artworks are on display throughout the College Park Marriott Hotel & Conference Center and the Administration Building in Adelphi. The main, lower-level gallery in Adelphi is open to the public from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. seven days a week, and the Leroy Merritt Center for the Art of Joseph Sheppard is open to the public from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days a week. More than 75,000 students, scholars, and visitors come to the Adelphi facilities each year.

UMGC ARTS PROGRAM

MISSION STATEMENT

The UMGC Arts Program is dedicated to furthering the university's objectives by creating a dynamic environment in which our diverse constituents, including students and the general public, can study and learn from direct exposure to our art collections, exhibitions, and educational programs.

CONTRIBUTORS

Director, Arts Program:
Eric Key

Curator:
Treston Sanders

Editors:
Sandy Bernstein, Barbara Reed

Senior Web and Graphic Design Manager:
Olya Kalatsei

Senior Graphic Designer:
Jennifer Norris

Senior Account Manager:
Laurie Bushkoff

Print Production and
Vendor Relations Manager:
Scott Eury

Fine Arts Technician:
René A. Sanjines

Administrative Assistant:
Tawanna Manago

Artwork photography by Tom Meyer
unless noted otherwise.

Additional artwork photography:
p. 9 (fig. 4), p. 15 (figs. 17–18), pp. 18–20, p. 41: Greg Staley
pp. 10, 16, 70, 74–77: Courtesy of the artist
pp. 12 (fig. 10), 13, 14 (fig. 15), 21 (bottom, right)–24, 31, 34,
36, 39, 43, 48, 50–52, 63 (left), 64, 66–67: John Woo

Cover artwork:
Monk Composition #19
1994, mixed media on wood
43 x 47 x 3 inches
Courtesy of Jenkins Johnson Gallery
(San Francisco, California)





When Promises Become Blessings I, 2017, etched aluminum,
57 x 29 x 7 inches. Collection of Kerry and C. Betty Davis
(Atlanta, Georgia)

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND GLOBAL CAMPUS
3501 University Boulevard East
Adelphi, MD 20783-8000 USA
umgc.edu/art