

Picturing the Black Racial Imaginary

A symposium inspired by the exhibition *Dawoud Bey: Elegy*



Fri & Sat, Jan 26–27, 2024 | Leslie Cheek Theater

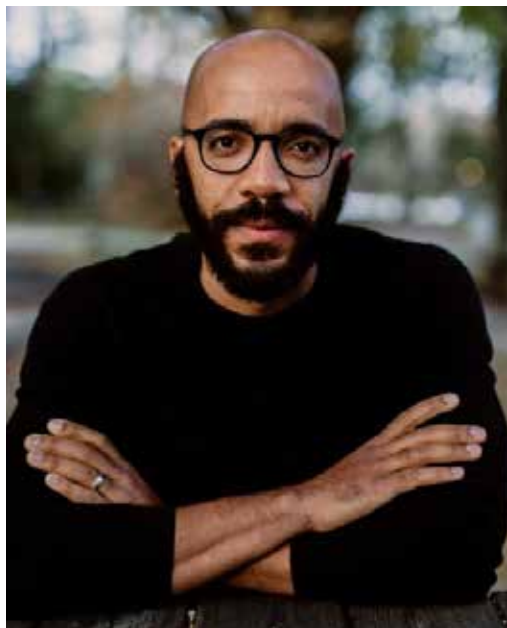
VMFA

VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

FRI, JAN 26, 2024 | 6–7:30 pm

Keynote Lecture | “How the Word Is Passed: Reckoning with Our Past to Build a Better World”

Clint Smith, PhD, is a *New York Times* best-selling author, award-winning poet, and staff writer for *The Atlantic*. Informed by scholarship, trips to different historical sites, and oral histories, Smith outlines how these sites resonate with history and reckon with—or fail to reckon with—their relationships to the past. Drawing on his award-winning book *How the Word Is Passed*, Smith illuminates how the past is an ever-present part of our current lives as well as a pathway forward into the future and how it challenges us as citizens to take responsibility to document, learn from, and account for this history.



Smith received his PhD in Education from Harvard University. His books *How the Word Is Passed* and *Above Ground* were *New York Times* bestsellers. Smith has received fellowships from several prestigious institutions, including the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. His essays, poems, and scholarly writing have been published in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Republic*, *Poetry Magazine*, *The Paris Review*, *the Harvard Educational Review*, and many more. He is a former National Poetry Slam champion and a recipient of the Jerome J. Shestack Prize from the *American Poetry Review*.

SAT, JAN 27, 2024 | 9 am–5 pm

9–9:30 am | Coffee & Registration

9:30–9:45 am | Opening Remarks

Valerie Cassel Oliver, Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, VMFA, and **Dawoud Bey**, Photographer and Educator

9:55–10:40 am | “An Origin Story”

Imani Perry, PhD, Carol K. Pforzheimer Professor, Harvard Radcliffe Institute; Henry A. Morss Jr. and Elisabeth W. Morss Professor of Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality and of African and African American Studies, Harvard Faculty of Arts and Sciences

10:50–11:25 am | “Preserving Our Histories”

Omilade Janine Bell, President and Artistic Director, Elegba Folklore Society
Ana Edwards, Public Historian

Lauranett Lee, PhD, Director of Race and Social Justice, Richmond Hill
Brian Palmer, Visual Journalist and Educator

Todd B. Waldo (moderator), Founder and Principal Consultant, Hugh Helen LLC

11:30–12:30 pm | Lunch (on your own)

Best Café (Level 1, Atrium) offers casual fare.

12:40–1:25 pm | “Fiction and Truth: Picturing the Black Racial Imaginary”

Dawoud Bey, Photographer and Educator

LeRonn P. Brooks, PhD, Curator of the African American Art History Initiative and African American Collections, Getty Research Institute

1:35–2:35 pm | “Performance and Traditions: A Conversation”

Rashida Bumbray, Curator and Choreographer

Valerie Cassel Oliver, Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, VMFA

2:45–3:40 pm | “Ordinary Notes”

Christina Sharpe, PhD, Writer and Canada Research Chair in Black Studies in the Department of Humanities, York University

3:45 pm | Closing Remarks

Valerie Cassel Oliver, Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, VMFA

Dawoud Bey, Photographer and Educator

4:00 pm | Book Signings

with Dawoud Bey; LeRonn P. Brooks, PhD; Imani Perry, PhD; and Christina Sharpe, PhD. Books will be available to purchase from the VMFA shop.

Museum closes at 5pm

SPEAKERS



Omilade Janine Bell, founder and president of Elegba Folklore Society Inc., is an artist, folklorist, cultural historian, and producer who curates exhibitions of visual arts and creates and produces performances of African dance, music, and theater in Richmond and on tour. She designs and guides cultural history tours that strengthen connections within the African Diaspora.



LeRonn P. Brooks, PhD, is the curator of the African American Art History Initiative at the Getty Research Institute (GRI) and curator of African American collections and acquisitions at the GRI. He is also curator and co-curator of several archives, including those of the Johnson Publishing Company, architect Paul Revere Williams, sculptor Richard Hunt, and others.



Rashida Bumbray is a choreographer, curator, and the former director of Open Society Foundations' Culture & Art Program. Throughout her career, she has encouraged artists to make work on their own terms and to take risks, and she has lifted up the authorship and agency of contemporary artists of color.



Ana Edwards is a public historian specializing in 18th- and 19th-century Black life in Virginia and Gabriel's Rebellion. She is an assistant professor in VCU's Department of African American Studies. Among her leadership roles, she has worked to reclaim and properly memorialize the Shockoe Bottom area of Richmond, which was once the epicenter of the US domestic slave trade.



Laurantt Lee, PhD, is the director of Race and Social Justice at Richmond Hill. She is a public historian, founding curator of African American history at what is now the Virginia Museum of History and Culture, and author of *Making the American Dream Work: A Cultural History of African Americans in Hopewell, Virginia*.

SPEAKERS



Brian Palmer is a Peabody Award-winning visual journalist who lives in Richmond's Church Hill. Since the end of 2014, he and his wife, Erin Holloway Palmer, have been part of the volunteer effort to reclaim East End Cemetery, a historic African American burial ground in Henrico County, Virginia. Palmer has taught at Hampton University, the University of Richmond, and the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism.



Imani Perry, PhD, is a scholar of law, literature, an author of creative nonfiction, and a 2023 MacArthur Fellow. Her most recent book, *South to America: A Journey Below the Mason-Dixon to Understand the Soul of a Nation*, won the 2022 National Book Award for nonfiction and was a *New York Times* bestseller.



Christina Sharpe, PhD, is the author of *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*; *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*, and, most recently, *Ordinary Notes*, which was named a finalist for the National Book Award in nonfiction. She is currently Canada Research Chair in Black Studies in the Department of Humanities, at York University, in Toronto.



Todd B. Waldo's more than 25 years of engineering experience helps executives and their teams develop enterprise-wide strategies and systems. Across technology, health care, nonprofits, and higher education markets, his work impacts organizations and communities. An accomplished author, speaker, host, and moderator, his expertise transcends boundaries and fosters transformative dialogues.

ABOUT THE CURATOR AND ARTIST



Valerie Cassel Oliver, VMFA's Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art and curator for *Dawoud Bey: Elegy*, is considered one of America's leading scholars of modern and contemporary art. With a particular focus on representation, inclusivity, and the highlighting of artists of different social and cultural backgrounds.



Dawoud Bey is a photographer and educator celebrated for his rich, psychologically compelling portraits. His work has been defined by the empathy he brings to his subjects and the complexity with which he depicts them. Renowned for his early street photography and deeply probing portraits, the 2017 MacArthur Fellow's recent bodies of landscape work focus on the construction of history and memory.

Dawoud Bey: Elegy, on view through Feb 25, 2024, was organized by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and curated by Valerie Cassel Oliver.

Presented by



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Exhibition Tickets & Details
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