

LARGE PRINT GUIDE

**BENJAMIN
WIGFALL
& Communications
Village**

June 17, 2023–September 10, 2023

VMFA

VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

PLEASE RETURN TO VISITOR SERVICES

It is hard to say if he lives in art or if art lives in him.

—Leo Katz

[Introduction]

Benjamin Wigfall left an indelible mark as an artist and teacher across several communities in Virginia and New York. This exhibition constitutes the first retrospective of his art career. It begins with his early work as a student in the late 1940s and continues through his years at Communications Village, a community art center and printmaking studio that he founded in 1973 and ran for the following decade.

Organized geographically as well as chronologically, Wigfall's paintings, assemblages, and prints provide a powerful visual narrative that reflects the importance of the communities that shaped him and those he helped to shape. Midway through the exhibition, it expands into a group show with the introduction of Communications Village and the extraordinary network of

artists Wigfall invited there to make prints, give talks, and mentor students.

Abstraction served as Wigfall's primary artistic language, and printmaking increasingly became his main artistic medium. Woodblocks and etching plates accompany their corresponding prints at several points in the exhibition. Along with other archival material, they help demonstrate how the multistep process of making prints allows a singular, artistic vision to become a shared experience of community expression.

GALLERY 1



BENJAMIN WIGFALL & THE VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

No other artist's story weaves so consistently through the warp and weft of both the museum's acquisition program and its educational mission than that of Benjamin Wigfall. He grew up in Richmond's Church Hill neighborhood and first experienced the museum when he attended VMFA's segregated classes in the spring of 1948. There he saw his first work of abstract art, which he remembered throughout his career as an important turning point in his artistic development.

Almost immediately, a mutual admiration between Wigfall and VMFA developed. He won two VMFA student fellowships to study at Hampton Institute (now University), in 1949 and 1951, followed by a fellowship from an anonymous donor in 1952 to fund his

final year at Hampton. While he was still a student, he received a prize from VMFA for his painting *Chimneys*, which was acquired for the collection. The museum purchased a second painting, *Corrosion and Blue*, in 1958. Thus, within a decade of coming to understand abstraction at VMFA, Wigfall had contributed two of his own abstract paintings to the museum's collection.



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Chimneys, 1951

Oil on canvas

*There's a nobility in something very common.
... And that could be anywhere, except for
me it is very specifically from Richmond.*

—Benjamin Wigfall

Wigfall's surroundings inspired and informed his imagery. In this case, he portrayed the chimneys beside the Marshall Street viaduct, a pedestrian and trolley bridge that connected downtown Richmond to Church Hill. He recalled it as a familiar scene on his walks home from school:

“And I remember it was becoming dusk, and I saw these smokestacks, and I refer to them as still whispering because I always thought at a certain time of day you could see them billowing with smoke, and they

were busy. And oh! It was such a serene, quiet thing. It was such a noble thing the silhouette of these; they begin to have personalities almost, and character.”

Wigfall employed abstraction to translate complex forms into simplified geometric shapes; however, the organic bends and slightly wobbly edges of the chimneys convey a sense of vulnerability. His minimal use of slivers of primary colors within the black-and-white palette also lends a quietness to the composition.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, General Endowment Fund,
51.7.5

Benjamin Wigfall's Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Fellowship application with photograph, May 15, 1949

Director's Correspondence (RG-01), Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, RGo1.01.1.33863.007

Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

The House on 30th Street,

ca. 1947–49

Black ink on wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.196

Leo Katz's recommendation letter for Benjamin Wigfall, May 8, 1952

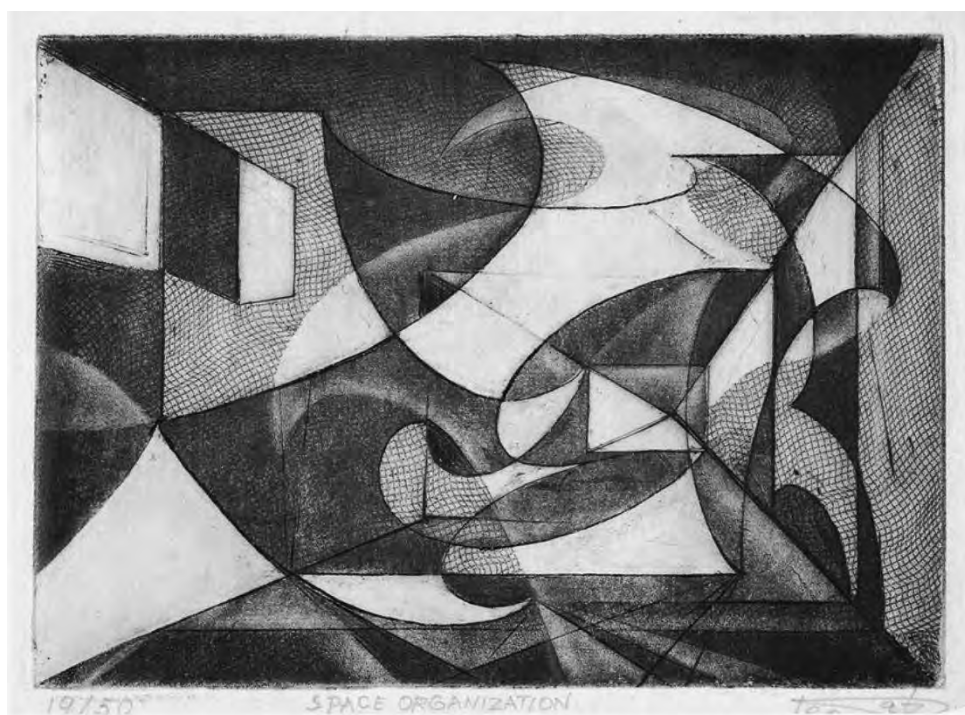
Director's Correspondence (RG-01), Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, RGo1.01.1.33863.009

Benjamin Wigfall was raised in a close-knit African American community in the Church Hill neighborhood of Richmond's East End in the 1930s and 1940s. His father, James Andrew, worked for the railroad, and his mother, Willie Cogen, worked in the city's tobacco warehouses before opening a beauty salon located behind their house on 27th Street. He had two older sisters, Josie and Florence.

Wigfall's artistic skills were evident from a young age, but regular art classes were not offered at Armstrong High School, where he was a student. After Wigfall repeatedly asked the principal to hire an art teacher, Stafford Evans appeared in the spring semester of his senior year. The new teacher, Wigfall recalled, changed his life. Evans brought him to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts for the first time, to attend segregated art classes. There he met Mary

Godfrey, assistant state supervisor for art education, who encouraged him to apply for a VMFA fellowship to attend Hampton Institute.

Wigfall submitted this ink drawing of a house on 30th Street in Church Hill, along with his successful 1949 VMFA fellowship application.



Leo Katz

American, 1887–1982

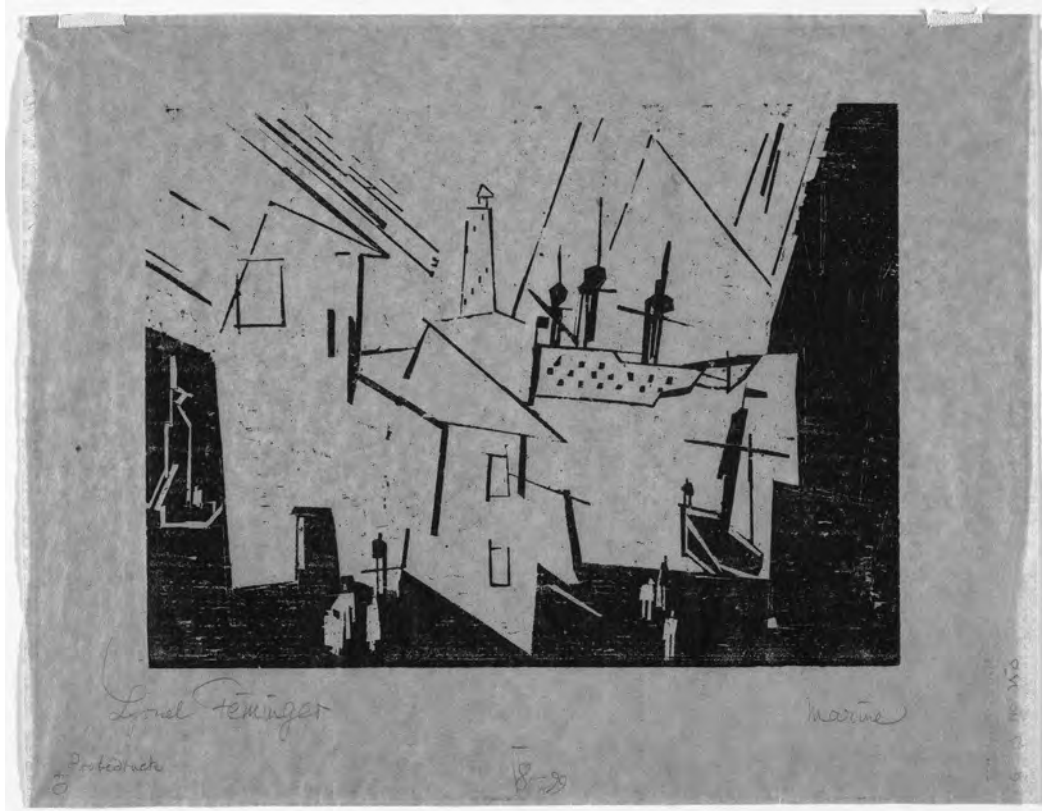
Space Organization, 1945

Engraving and soft ground etching

Leo Katz, a Czech American painter, printmaker, and muralist, chaired Hampton's art department while Wigfall was a student there. He quickly recognized the young artist's talent and became his advocate at Hampton and VMFA, while also introducing Wigfall to artists and collectors in his own circles.

Katz's letter recommending Wigfall for the 1952–53 VMFA fellowship (in the case below) illustrates Wigfall's enormous growth from the time he received his first fellowship in 1949 until he earned a prestigious purchase award from VMFA for his painting *Chimneys* in 1951. Katz's descriptions of the twenty-one-year-old Wigfall applied over his entire life: "It is hard to say if he lives in art or if art lives in him."

Courtesy the Leo Katz Foundation



Lyonel Feininger

American, 1871–1956

The Harbor, 1918

Woodcut

On one of Wigfall's early visits to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, in 1948, he saw Lyonel Feininger's painting *Moonwake*, on loan to the museum:

“In order to see the portraits, I had to pass by this thing on the wall which I actually now know to be by Feininger. . . . It was just a bunch of prisms and lines and so forth. And one day catching the bus, the bus turned and there was a reflection in its windows of the windows of the buildings and suddenly with this flickering, I saw this Feininger painting—or I understood this Feininger painting. This was really my introduction to abstraction, my introduction and discovery of abstraction.”

This print, although not the work Wigfall saw, shares some of the same compositional characteristics with *Moonwake*. Under the guidance of several key teachers, Wigfall developed an abstract mode of working as a student, and abstraction would become his primary artistic language for the rest of his career.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of the Lipman Foundation in memory of Jeanette S. Lipman, 2017.246



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Jumprope, ca. 1952–54

Woodcut on mulberry paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.199

Jumprope (recto); Composition (verso), 1952–54

Woodblock

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.08.1.003

Composition, 1954

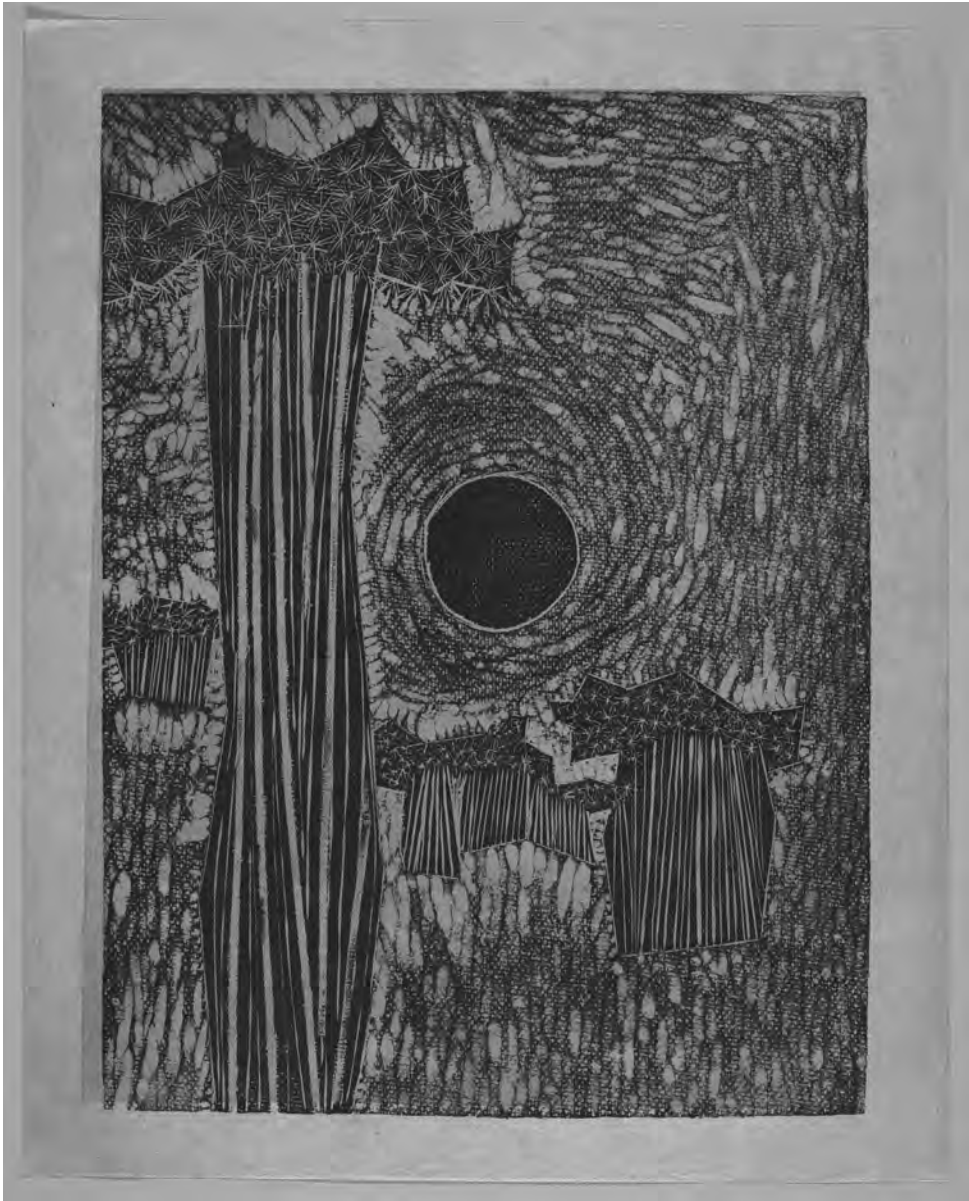
Woodcut on mulberry paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.198

The two very different images on the opposing sides of this woodblock demonstrate Wigfall's continued explorations of both figurative and abstract art through the early 1950s. He made

Composition in 1954 while studying at Yale; however, it is not clear when he carved or printed *Jump rope*. His sketchbooks from the same era show him moving back and forth seamlessly between recognizable drawings of people or landscapes on one page and abstracted compositions of lines and shapes on the next.

While he began working exclusively in an abstract style by 1956, he never expressed a dogmatic belief in a hierarchical distinction between these forms of artistic expression beyond his own personal, artistic language. He continued to admire and promote the work of several artists in his circle, such as A. B. Jackson, who worked primarily in a realistic, figurative style.



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Untitled, ca. 1952–54

Relief print on wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.191



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Untitled, 1954

Zinc plate

Untitled, 1954

Etching and aquatint in black ink on laid paper

Wigfall layered lines and forms etched at different levels and used an aquatint process to make different textures on the zinc plate for *Untitled*. Its compositional complexity provides a clear example of the ways in which he simultaneously began pushing the boundaries of abstraction and printmaking techniques while studying at Yale in 1954.

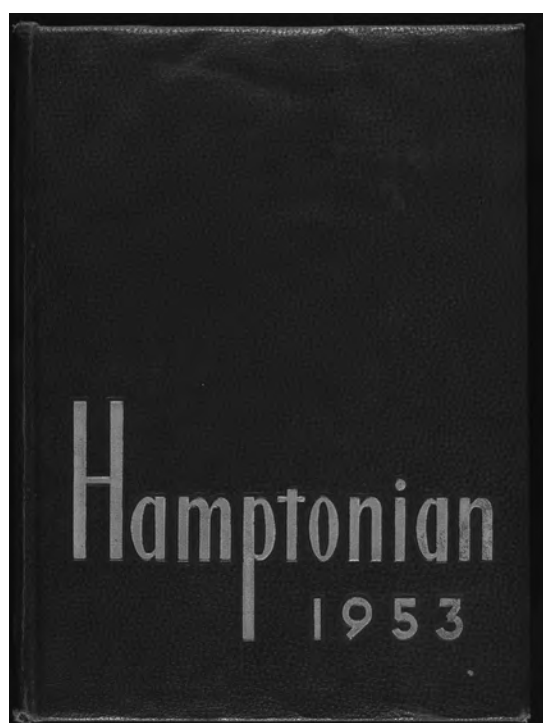
Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.o8.1.006, 2022.186

THE HAMPTON YEARS

As a matter of fact, Hampton at that time had one of the best art schools in the South, period. — Benjamin Wigfall, 1976

Wigfall spent more than a decade at Hampton Institute, a historically Black university in Hampton, Virginia, first as a student from 1949 to 1953 and then as a teacher from 1955 to 1963. Earlier in the 1940s, the art department had gained a high profile after several graduates went on to achieve national reputations. Although they had left by the time Wigfall began, he, too, quickly established a reputation as a serious artist. The art department chair, Leo Katz, championed Wigfall's promise of growing "into an important addition to American art." Hampton acquired his painting *Crucifixion* in 1953, while he was still a student.

After graduation, he studied first at Iowa State University before entering the Master of Fine Arts program at Yale University's School of Design in 1954. Although he continued to paint, his mentor at Yale, Gabor Peterdi, convinced him to fully embrace printmaking. He returned to Hampton, where he became a beloved professor as his art simultaneously achieved recognition on a national level in publications such as *Art in America* and *American Painting Today*



**Benjamin Wigfall with his painting
Chimneys, Virginia Artists exhibition,
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1951**

**Hampton Institute Student Exhibit,
ca. 1949–53**

**Hampton Institute yearbook, *The
Hamptonian*, 1953**

**Benjamin Wigfall with his painting
Stepping Stones, ca. 1956**

**Benjamin Wigfall, photograph for
Yale application, 1954**

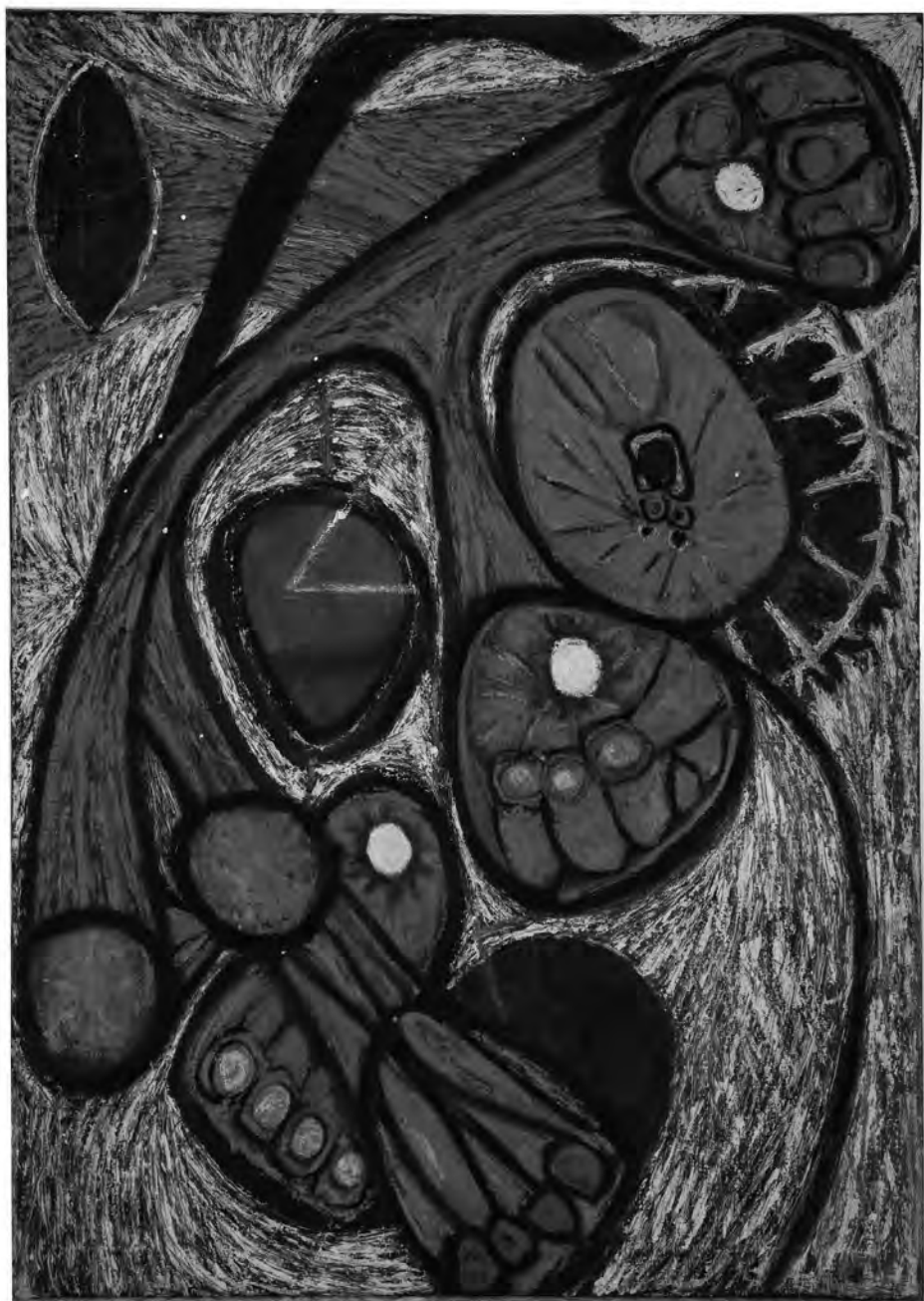


**Benjamin Wigfall looking at *Composition* in the Yale University studio,
1954**

Benjamin Wigfall in the Yale University studio, ca. 1954

**Benjamin Wigfall working at the
press in the Yale University studio,
ca. 1954**

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives,
VA12.01.2.010, VA12.01.2.008, VA12.01.2.009,
VA12.01.2.001, VA12.01.2.007, VA12.01.2.004,
VA12.01.2.005, VA12.01.2.006



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Crucifixion, 1952

Oil on canvas

During his time as chair of the art department at Hampton, Leo Katz developed a program for students of art history to learn about classical Renaissance art and themes while simultaneously studying the abstract, compositional techniques of modern artists such as Picasso, Miró, and Mondrian.

On several occasions between 1952 and 1953, Wigfall appears to have explored classic biblical imagery, as had many Renaissance artists, through the mode of modernist abstraction. *Crucifixion* is the earliest example of this thematic engagement. A year later, several glowing newspaper reviews from Norfolk and

Newport News cited a solo exhibition of Wigfall's work at the Norfolk Museum of Arts and Sciences (now the Chrysler Museum of Art) that took up the theme of betrayal via the disciple Judas's kiss of Christ. Exhibited during the summer after the artist's graduation from Hampton in 1953, the drawings were apparently sketches for a monumental five-part fresco mural that was never realized.

Hampton University Museum, Hampton, Virginia



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Victim and Accused, 1955

Etching on laid paper

Crucifixion provides an important stylistic and thematic precedent for Wigfall's 1955 print *Victim and Accused*. Reminiscent of Picasso's mural *Guernica*, painted during the Spanish civil war, Wigfall's composition also implies a universal struggle between right and wrong. Although Wigfall rarely made concrete connections between political events and the subject of his art, he felt compelled to make a clear, moral statement against segregation in a local Newport News newspaper, the *Daily Press*, printed on December 17, 1955:

“But, in a democracy, a local custom is ethical only in so far as it does not infringe on the rights and dignity belonging to every group

in the community, and there is no doubt that segregation is discriminatory, is intended to inflict restriction on one group to satisfy the prejudices of another. This is a local custom which cannot be justified and which must go! There is no moral choice, even were it legally supportable.”

While the precise inspiration for *Victim and Accused* is unknown, Wigfall produced the image just as the state of Virginia entered the era of “Massive Resistance” to racial integration during which the surveillance and enforcement of segregation increased.

Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.200



Gabor Peterdi

American, born Hungary, 1915–2001

Nervous Lobster, 1947

Etching on Arches wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund and National Endowment for the Arts Fund for American Art, 2022.56

Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Untitled, 1954

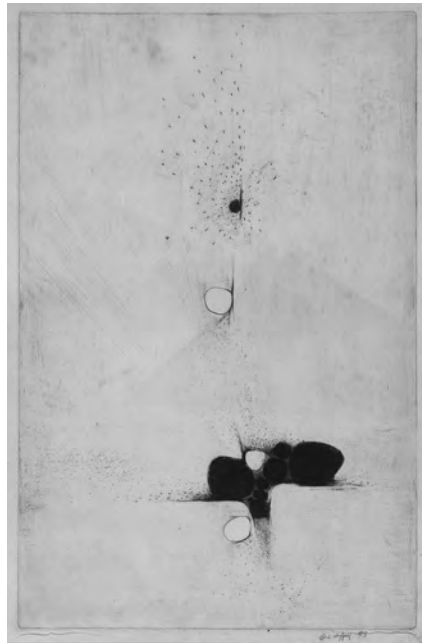
Etching on wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.192

While studying in Norfolk, Connecticut, in 1954 at the prestigious summer fellowship program run by Yale University, Wigfall impressed the Hungarian American artist Gabor Peterdi. He invited Wigfall to begin the Yale University School of Art master's program that fall. Peterdi admired the

“graphic” nature of Wigfall’s work and encouraged him to shift his focus from painting to printmaking. Like Leo Katz, Wigfall’s mentor at Hampton, Peterdi actively participated in New York City’s printmaking circles, including the experimental printmaking studio Atelier 17.

Under his mentorship, Wigfall learned many of Peterdi’s signature techniques, such as his use of embossed shapes. The small, raised, organic shapes in Wigfall’s adjacent print share formal similarities with the embossed squares dotted throughout *Nervous Lobster*.



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Secrets, 1955

Etching on laid paper

Untitled, 1954

Etching on wove paper

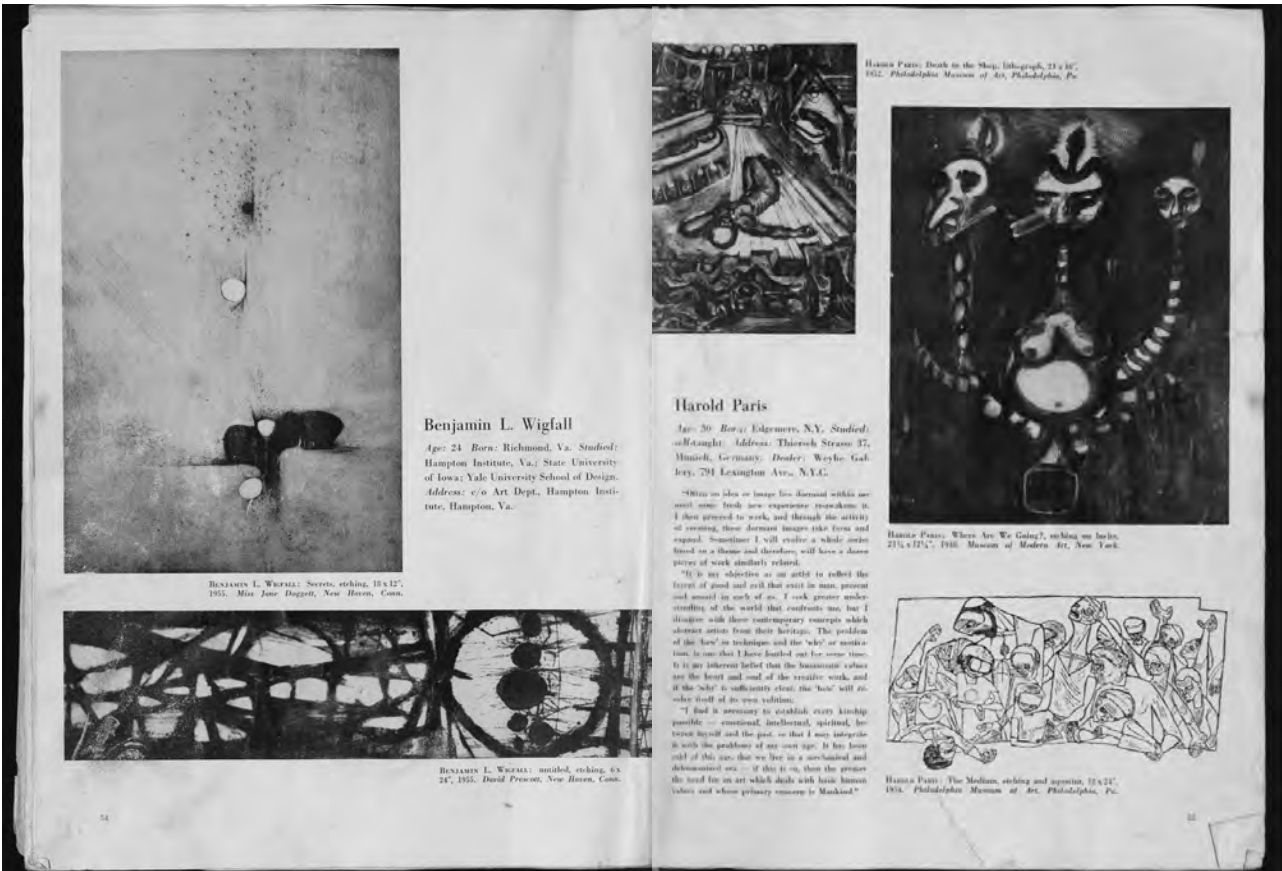
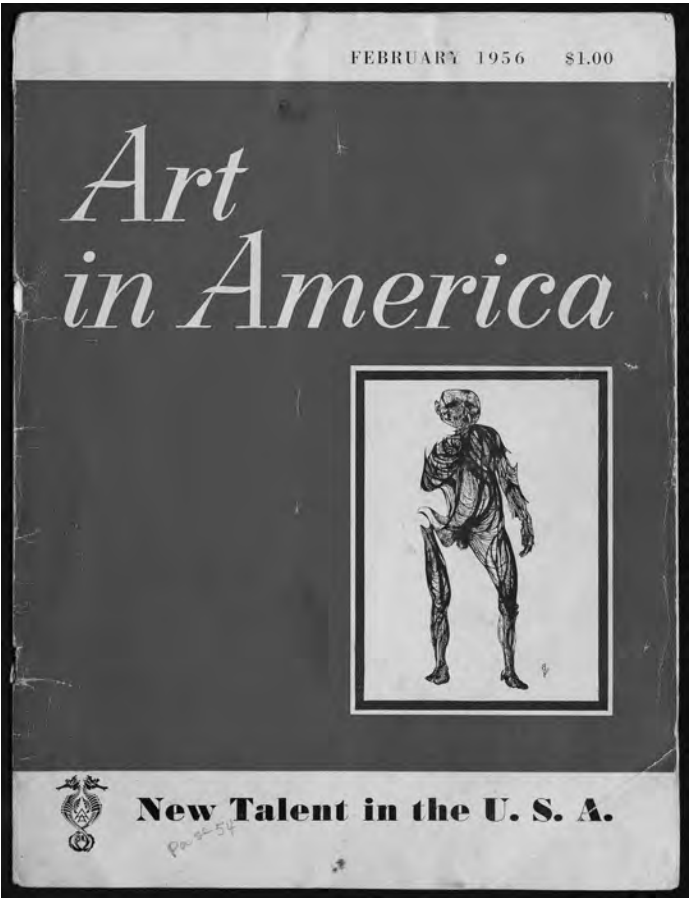
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret
Glasgow Endowment, 2022.201, 2022.193

IN CASE

Secrets, 1955

Zinc plate

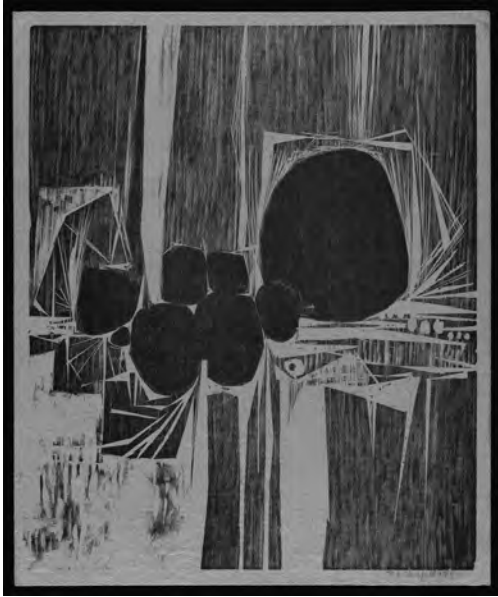
Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives,
VA12.o8.1.004



Art in America: New Talent in the U.S.A, February 1956

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.01.6.001

While Wigfall continued to receive accolades for his paintings, his prints also quickly earned national recognition. *Art in America* spotlighted Wigfall in the 1956 edition titled “New Talent in the U.S.A.” featuring his prints *Secrets* and *Untitled*. He was part of a select group of artists to have their works reproduced for the special issue. Reviews of his prints and paintings appeared in numerous publications in the mid-1950s.



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Untitled, May 1955

Block print on wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.190

IN CASE

Untitled, 1955

Woodblock

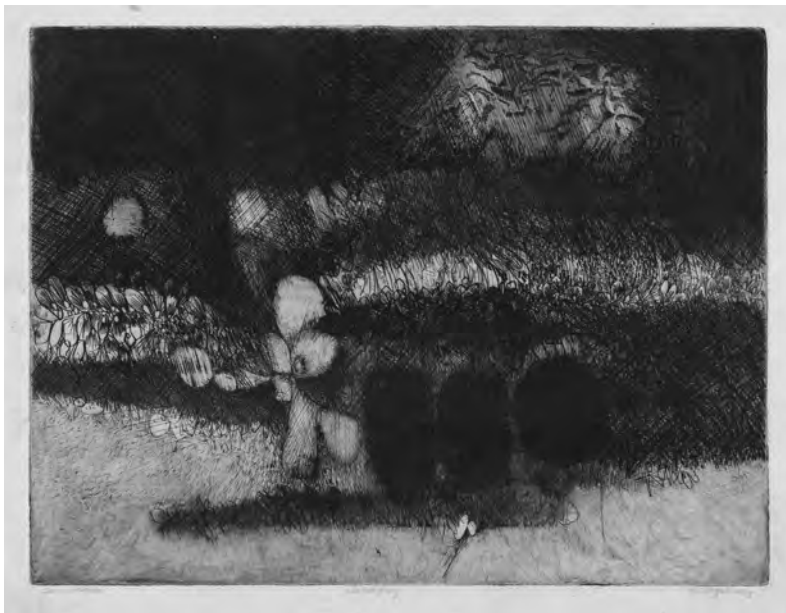
Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.08.1.002

Sketchbook, undated

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.08.2.005

This woodblock print, much like the adjacent etching *Secrets*, reveals Wigfall's profound interest in concepts associated with physics, such as weight, friction, and

tension. The form of organic circles or rocks appear throughout many of his works, from drawings like the one in his sketchbook below to paintings such as *Stepping Stones* and assemblages like *Dark Passages*.



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Stepping Stones, 1955

Oil on linen canvas

Courtesy the Estate of Benjamin Wigfall

Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Fermentation, 1958

Etching on wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.204

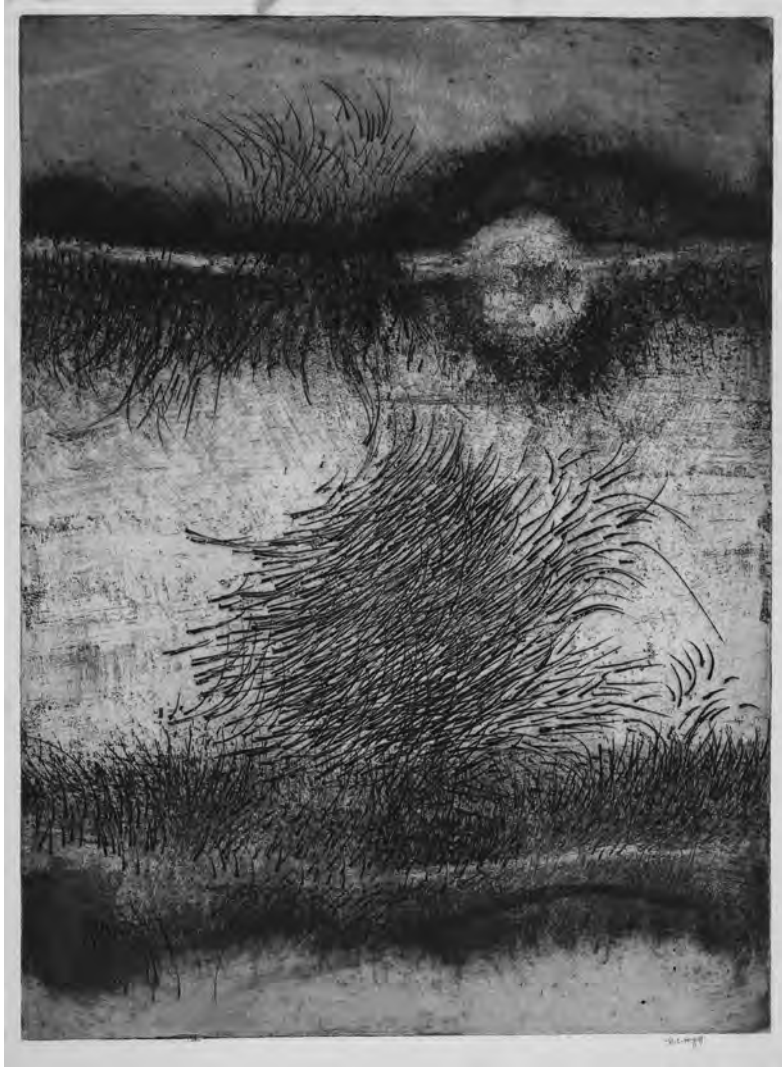
Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Resurrection, 1959

Etching on wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.20



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Untitled (Transition between Decadence), 1959

Etching on wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.205



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Christmas Card, 1958

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.01.5.001

Untitled (Christmas card design), 1958

Opaque watercolor on wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Revolving Sales Fund, 58.44

New Year's Card, 2023

Director's Correspondence (RG-01), Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, RGo1.01.9.001

Untitled (alternate Christmas card design), 1958

Opaque watercolor on wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Gift of the artist, 2007.27

Every year from 1949 until 1968, VMFA's director, Leslie Cheek, chose one leading Virginia artist to compose an image for the museum's holiday card. Cheek bestowed the honor on Wigfall in 1958 in recognition of his recent painting purchase award for *Corrosion and Blue*, as well as his long-standing relationship with the museum.

Wigfall submitted two possible designs. Cheek chose the one with the more traditional Christmas color palette of dark red and green; however, Wigfall noted in a letter accompanying his second design that he preferred the one with blue, ocher, and black. Current director, Alex Nyerges, used Wigfall's first choice for VMFA's 2023 New Year's card.

MOVING NORTH & SHIFTING MEDIUMS

Wigfall left Hampton in 1963 after accepting a position in the art department at the State University of New York at New Paltz, specifically as a professor of printmaking. He did, not, however, leave his practice as a painter completely behind. From the later 1950s through the 1960s, Wigfall merged aspects of printmaking and painting in his assemblages.

All these works share an intense shade of blue paint, while most of them also show evidence of his woodburning technique, which was not unlike the etching process of engraving a metal plate. Although Wigfall did not date most of these works, slides and other documents suggest that he began this practice while still in Hampton and continued it in New Paltz until about 1970.

The assemblage technique of building a

composition also informed the collograph prints Wigfall made in the early 1990s. He constructed the plates for these prints from scraps of cardstock and paper mounted on a paper support.



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Corrosion and Blue, 1957

Mixed media on wood

In the late 1950s, Wigfall became interested in the visual and conceptual complexity of the stages of erosion and decay. He explained, “There are a variety of colors in corrosion. How exciting and dull at the same time. There is also a reference to burning, and the blue functions as my red.”

While Wigfall never made a direct connection between his art and any specific events in his personal life, he painted *Corrosion* in the year he was falsely arrested in downtown Richmond. He described that experience as a moment of awakening: “You find out about a system, or a government, or where you have been living, you find out on an occasion like this, when you begin to see

the connections.” According to Wigfall, this almost completely abstract mode of painting provided a way to communicate beyond specific words or images: “It was my way of understanding my world, or my physical world. It’s the only thing I could say. In my mind, there were no images for what I wanted to do, or that I wanted to convey.”

In 1958, *Corrosion and Blue* earned Wigfall another purchase prize from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, this time for a juried exhibition of American paintings.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, John Barton Payne Fund,
58.13.6



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Dark Passage, ca. 1957–70

Woodburning and paint on wood

James and Jessika Wilkinson and Andrew Haley
and Suzanne Zylonis

Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Untitled, ca. 1957–70

Plywood, found wood, paint

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.185

Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Untitled, ca. 1957–70

Wood, metal nails, paint

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.202



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Untitled, ca. 1957–70

Leaf, metal foil, paper, and paint, adhered to paperboard

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.188

Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Untitled, ca. 1957–70

Found wood, paint

James and Jessika Wilkinson and Andrew Haley and Suzanne Zylonis



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Untitled (Within the Crowd), 1993

Collograph on Arches wove paper

Interlocution, 1993

Collograph on wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.221, 2022.189

IN CASE

Untitled (Within the Crowd), 1993

Paper and cardstock adhered to rigid paperboard

Interlocution, 1993

Paper and cardstock adhered to fiberboard

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.o8.1.007, VA12.o8.1.001



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Untitled, ca. 1970–72

Etching on Arches wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.209



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Four Part Shape Theme, 1971

Etching on wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.209

IN CASE

Four Part Shape Theme, 1971

Zinc plate

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.08.1.005



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Nine Part Black Theme, 1971

Etching on Arches wove paper

Nine Part Black Theme, 1971

Etching on Arches wove paper

Nine Part Black Theme, 1971

Etching on Arches wove paper

Nine Part Black Theme, 1971

Etching on Arches wove paper

In the series he titled *Nine Part Black Theme*, Wigfall used the same cut plate of an abstract shape turned in various directions for each print. He sometimes incorporated additional shapes to the composition. The “Nine” of the title remains cryptic as the series appears to contain more than nine variations and the shape of the central form in the print has more than

nine protrusions. Although he did not leave a written record explaining the inspiration for the series or its title, Wigfall clearly considered it an important part of his body of work as he showed it both at Communications Village in the 1970s and in an exhibition at Hampton University in the 1990s.

He also made another related series, *4 Part Shape Theme*, which he printed in different colors, including the green-hued work featured on the adjacent wall.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.214, 2022.211, 2022.212, 2022.213

GALLERY 3



COMMUNICATIONS VILLAGE

When he began at SUNY New Paltz, Wigfall was the only Black faculty member. In the context of this overwhelmingly white environment and the civil rights movement, he began to search for ways to root his practice in a Black community and thereby to incorporate Black voices and culture into his work. He eventually found an abandoned, brick livery stable in the Ponckhockie neighborhood of nearby Kingston, which he planned to renovate into his studio. As youth from the community began to help, his practice as a printmaker quickly merged with his philosophy as an arts educator.

Wigfall founded Communications Village in 1973, and it became a community gathering place as well as a printmaking and photography studio that offered art classes. He conceived of the effort as a merging of

“traditional art” with participatory, collective, and aesthetic expression rooted in simple, daily lived experiences. Before long, he welcomed fellow artists from New York City, as well as colleagues and recent graduates from SUNY New Paltz, to make prints at the studio as they also engaged with the community.



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Gathering, 1973

Etching on wove paper

Gathering provides an important link between Wigfall's assemblage technique and his printmaking practice. Whereas he used wood and blue paint to build his assemblage compositions, here he incorporated a pattern suggesting woodgrain as part of the abstract image, layering it horizontally and printing it in blue. Based on the date, it was likely made by Wigfall at Communications Village.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.195

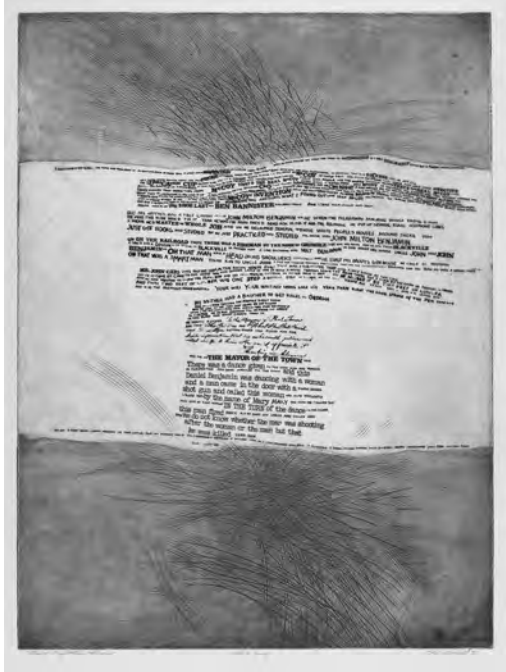
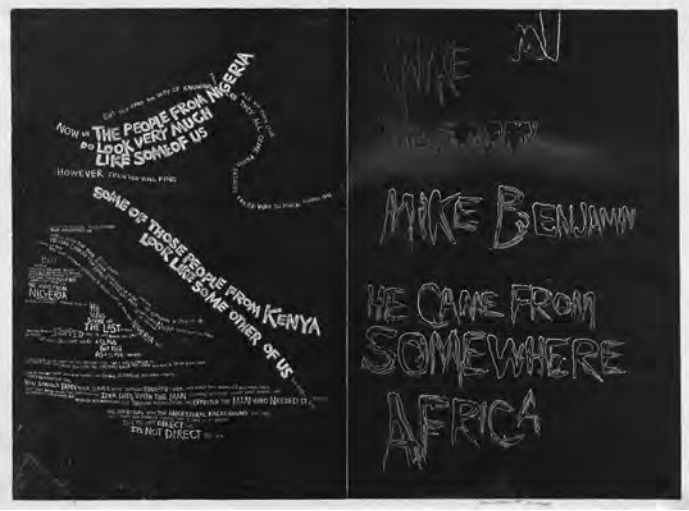
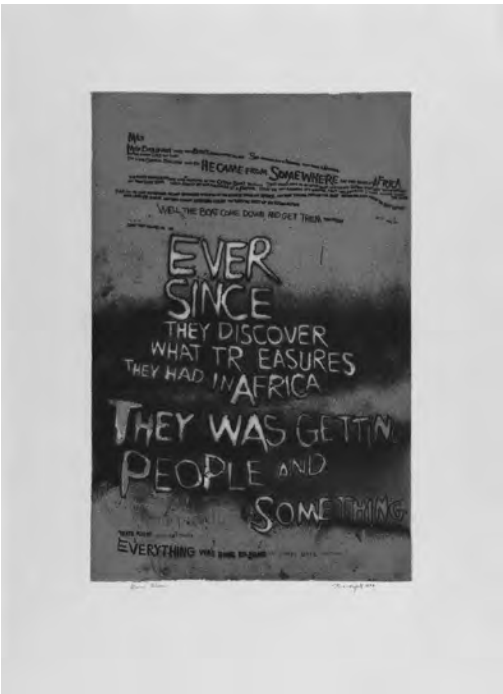
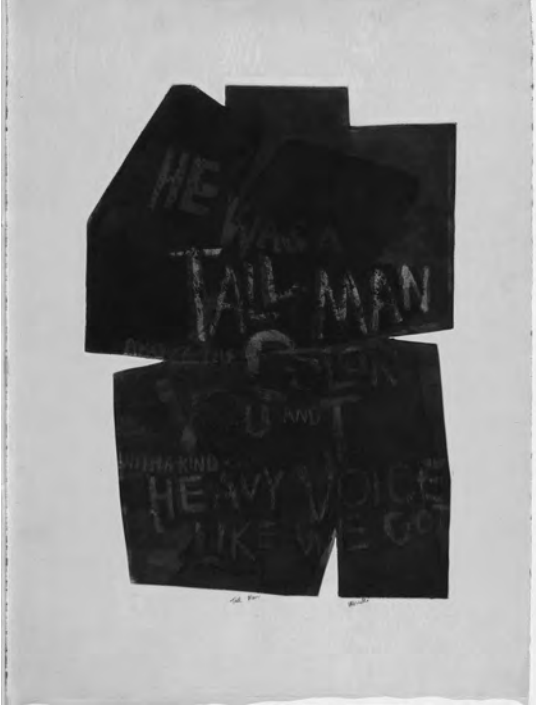
THINGS MY FATHER TOLD ME

The audio excerpts playing here correspond with the words represented in the prints on this wall. Both come from a longer conversation Wigfall recorded in the late 1960s with his father, James Andrew Wigfall, about their family's roots. His father's words, voice, and cadence inspired Wigfall to begin translating sound into dynamic visual compositions, leading to the development of what he described as "audio-graphic expression." In the prints, Wigfall only transcribed his father's words, while the audio segments also include Wigfall's questions and comments for his father.

Their dialogue is infused with a sense of belonging as well as a matter-of-fact acknowledgment of the violent ruptures and gaps in familial knowledge wrought by

the institution of slavery. His father related stories of his ancestors from Edgefield, South Carolina, and Benjamin pressed him to remember whether anyone had memories of Africa. The transatlantic slave trade was outlawed in the United States in 1808; nevertheless, his father recalled that his maternal grandfather, Mike Benjamin, told him that his father, General Benjamin, was able to remember the coast of Africa. He also reminded Benjamin Wigfall that his first name came from that side of the family, the Benjamins.

Press these buttons to listen to the audio segments that correspond with each print. Only one recording will play at a time.



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Untitled (He Was a Tall Man), 1975

Intaglio on wove paper

Things My Father Told Me, Tall Man II, 1977

Intaglio on wove paper

Ever Since, 1973

Intaglio on Arches wove paper

Like Some of Us, Some Other of Us, 1969

Intaglio on wove paper

Things My Father Told Me, 1973

Etching on wove paper

Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment 2022.220,
2022.210, 2022.218, 2022.208, 2022.219

Benjamin Wigfall listed “Audio Recording” as one of the services offered on the poster for Communications Village in the adjacent room. The activity “involves collecting on audio tape the history and events—the sounds unique to the life and history of the community.” Like his conversation with his father, some of these community recordings inspired more of Wigfall’s “audio-graphic” prints. In an explanation of the process from his 1979 *Intaglio Print Editions* pamphlet, he described how the recording and the resulting print relate to one another:

“Being part of what the artist calls an audio-graphic expression, a sound tape is to accompany the work. The sound tape and the print is each a work in its own right. When the tape is played while viewing the print, the feed-back between the contemplative stimulation of both the audial and visual senses will create a new aesthetic

experience and information different from each single format without loss of either.”

A photograph taken at Communications Village in 1977 documents audio equipment set up in front of many of the same prints on view in this room.

James Andrew Wigfall, ca. 1968

Color photograph

Benjamin Wigfall's transcription of audio recording with James Andrew Wigfall, ca. 1968

Benjamin Wigfall writing audio-graphic text on Mylar, ca. 1970s

Gelatin silver print

Benjamin Wigfall's "Project: Audio-Graphic System," ca. 1970s



"RICHMOND IMPETUS"

The impetus for my initiating the establishment of Communications Village is at least twofold. First from a non-objective and professional viewpoint, having observed and participated in Universities in their traditional structure and more recent attempts at community involvement I am increasingly aware of gaps that are not filled, significant numbers of people that are not reached, and sources of possible enrichment that are not tapped. In many cases this is not due to a flaw or a lack of conscientiousness on the part of the Universities but may well lie outside of their direct province or responsibility. In particular I am referring to a need for impetus and focus generating from a community outside of the Universities, though sharing in a mutual concern.

My second motivation is quite personal. Having taught in Universities, (including ones predominantly Black colleges), for nearly two decades I have felt that my effectiveness in dealing with the non-academic population, (particularly Black), has been much less than fulfilling- even frustrating. While being aware of and participating in tremendous accumulation of expertise and resources essential to the Universities, (and the corresponding time and energy involved), I have found less than satisfactory formats through which I could share or direct this resource, both my own and the Universities to those areas lying outside of the college program. I emphasize college program as opposed to community programs.

It is my observation that while many University involvements in the community are of the best intent, the traditional attitudes towards and within Universities tend to impede a truly actual

sharing and interchange of positive enrichment between University and community. Efforts are being made to correct this phenomenon but the impetus for the most part generates within, is conducted by and assumes the priorities of the University in such things as schedules, roles and location.

It is my intent to focus upon myself as a member of the non-academic community and through Communications Village provide a format to engage members of various communities in developing formats for the discovery and expression of positive virtues (many of which lie hidden in their own existence and backgrounds) and to bring together the sophistication of design and technology with the raw information of common existence. Communications Village would seek to create formats objective and conceptual which reveal to the participants in this effort and the general society the profundity, relevance and richness of that existence.

I have been and shall continue to be proud of my participation in the University, particularly the relationship with my students; but now seek to extend this and other aspects of my existence in an area where the need is equally as great if not more so, and in which existence and rediscovery of lifestyle holds for me a most inspirational resource.

Communications Village is a not for profit communication and design corporation, having on its Board people from a wide range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds who reside in the Mid-Indian Valley area. Although this board includes people from a wide racial and ethnic diversity, it is initially attempting to create a focus of African-American, Caribbean and migrant people in a venture that shares with the entire population an effort of mutual enrichment of life and art. (See "Communications Village" attachment).



Pat Jow Kagemoto

American, born 1952

Visitors looking at Wigfall's print at Communications Village, December 1976

Gelatin silver print

Benjamin Wigfall displaying his prints while playing audio tapes, 1977

Gelatin silver print

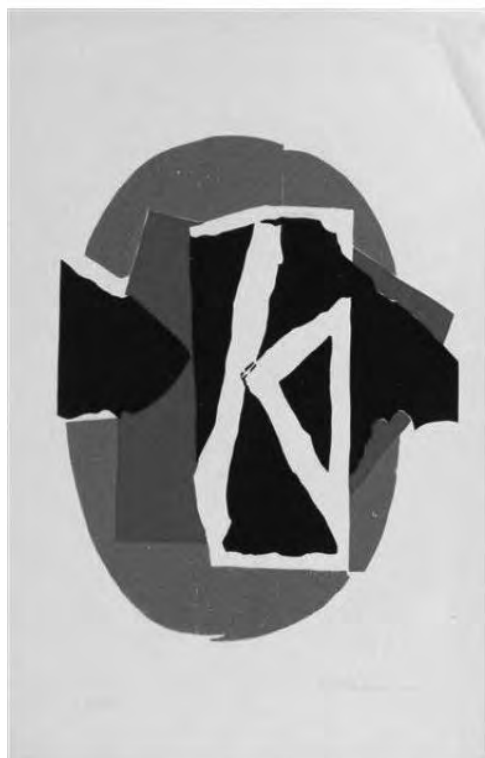
Benjamin Wigfall's "Background Impetus," ca. 1973

Benjamin Wigfall recording at River-view Baptist Church, Kingston, New York,

ca. 1970s

Gelatin silver print

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.03.1.001, VA12.03.1.003, VA12.04.4.004, VA12.01.5.023, VA12.04.4.005, VA12.04.4.003, VA12.04.1.001, VA12.01.8.001



Robert Hamilton Blackburn

American, 1920–2003

Untitled, 1962

Etching and aquatint on Arches wove paper

Kiss Shapes, 1970

Woodcut on mulberry paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund and National Endowment for the Arts Fund for American Art, 2022.62, 2022.63

Rose Tripoli

American, born 1942

Untitled (Robert Blackburn and Benjamin Wigfall at Communications Village),

ca. 1974–76

Gelatin silver print

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.239

Born and raised in Harlem, Robert Blackburn established The Printmaking Workshop in the New York City neighborhood of Chelsea in 1947. Blackburn's influence on the resurgence of printmaking in the New York art community was enormous, especially as his workshop became one of the few places where networks of white and Black artists overlapped. In the 1970s, Blackburn served as a key advisor for Benjamin Wigfall's Communications Village, which was modeled in many ways after Blackburn's workshop. Several of the visiting artists whom Benjamin Wigfall invited to Kingston had made prints in Blackburn's workshop before continuing their experimentation with printmaking in Wigfall's space. Rose Tripoli photographed the two artists together in the

door of Communications Village when Blackburn visited to give a presentation.

Blackburn primarily worked in abstraction from the late 1940s forward. *Kiss Shapes* and *Untitled* provide key examples of his dynamic forms across two printing techniques, woodcut and etching.

It became a haven for learning and being fascinated.

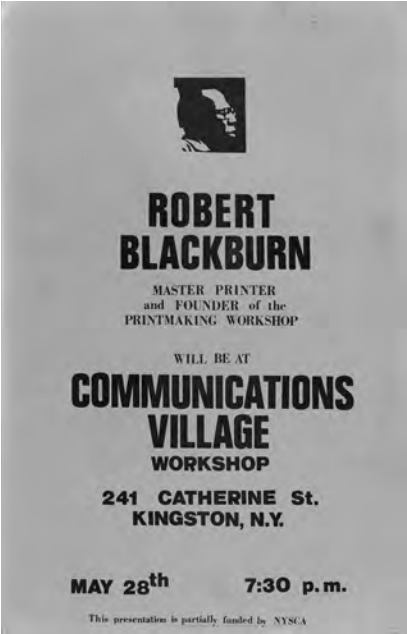
Larry Carpenter

We loved what we did and we did what we loved.

Bobby Easter

It was always dark and then the lights came on. He was the light.

Dina Washington & Teresa Thomas
Washington



Communications Village

Robert Blackburn Poster, ca. 1974–78

Relief print on wove paper

Rose Tripoli

American, born 1942

Communications Village Cut-Out,

ca. 1974–76

Mounted photograph with cropped photographs
and hardware

Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Rose Tripoli, photographer

American, born 1942

Diane Hunt, graphic designer

American, active 20th century

Communications Village Poster,

ca. 1977–78

C&A: Artist paints picture of involvement

By BARBARA LEON

Editorial Assistant

KINGSTON — Communications Village is a community art center operating out of an old livery stable in a largely black neighborhood on Catherine Street.

The man who provided the spark and holds the program together is Benjamin Wigfall, painter, printmaker, and art professor at the State University College at New Paltz.

Wigfall's credentials are impressive — master of fine arts from Yale University, more than 20 years of teaching experience, consultant for cable television and working with community art organizations.

But Wigfall emphasizes that the program would have little value without all the people, professional and nonprofessional, who participate.

"My concern is not to be put up as a star. This community needs that less than anything in the world," Wigfall says. "All the people participating here are the stars."

Communications Village has been in operation since 1973. However, many people first became aware of its existence last month when Wigfall joined with a number of community residents to sponsor a demonstration to protest police handling of the investigation into the death of Raymond Mosley, a black youth who died of skull injuries after he was struck with a 2-pound rock April 20, a week before his 13th birthday.

According to original reports, Mosley was struck by two white men on a motorcycle with Nazi-like insignia on their helmets. Police say they have a witness to contradict that report, but no official account of Mosley's death has been issued.

Q: How did Communications Village come about?

A: I didn't start this off to be Communications Village. I completely stumbled upon the building when I was looking for a studio of my own. It was accessible and easy enough for me to get, and it was an interesting building.

I set up the organization because I wanted people to be involved in this thing from the very source. I wanted a wide range of people to be involved — grassroots people, professional people and so forth.

I originally set it up as a printmaking studio because I said, "What would happen if nobody else came into it?" So I picked something that I myself could handle, had some expertise in.

I also was into re-establishing myself with people like those in this area because it's very much like the area in Richmond, Va., where I grew up. It was very fruitful to my work and yet I couldn't use people as guinea pigs. They had to be participants.

Q: What happens here on a daily basis?

A: Communications Village at the present time is about two things. First, it is a production space. We produce editions of prints.

Also, we have community exploration workshops. The most popular one is photography. There's also children's workshops, printmaking, and working with tape recordings.

This space functions as a lecture hall, movie house, gallery and workshop. As an artist, with something of a reputation, I try to use all my accumulated contacts. Some



'My whole purpose was to re-immense myself in what was my own culture, the culture and the forces that formed my life...'

— Benjamin Wigfall

very important artists come here to work. There are about five or seven kids who will come by here most anytime. If they see my car they'll be hanging on the door. These are the people that actually forced the kids' workshops. When we first had artists coming out and showing their stuff and talking, they wanted to make plates too and that got them turned on and I couldn't cut it off. I had to set up a time for it.

Q: What is your goal in working with community people?

A: I'm much more interested in honesty of expression than in what people call art. There's nothing very high-faluting, nothing very sophisticated about the stuff that's done here.

I'm not trying to make artists. I think a person who is an artist is condemned to be an artist. I want people to enjoy themselves.

These are people whose lives are about how they're going to get bread for their kids the next week or the next day, getting

to the hospital or clinic, the red tape they have to go through with all the great agencies that are supposed to be there to help them.

They are people who're caught up in the rags of all the so-called great machineries that the society has set up.

People like that will sit and watch a soap opera about some woman who's trying to decide whether this man loves her for her money or not and accept those things as important — which they are to people at that level. But the people who are caught in those rags don't see their own lives as important.

We try to show the relevance and richness of their lives and present it in such a way that everybody can see it.

Q: How does that get translated into everyday activities here?

A: One of the ways is by recording people going about what they see as their doing — unimportant days. We do this on film or on tape recordings. Right now we're work-

ing on a portfolio of photographs of the black women in this area.

We try to use forms that project people in much the same way that they see importance projected. People do nothing all day, but if that nothing were suddenly put on the television news, sometimes just by that format it causes them to look at themselves. This reinforces people to see what they can do about preserving the positive things in their lives and correcting the negative things.

Q: How do you find your work here different from teaching at the college?

A: For one thing, I'm really learning here as well. My whole purpose was to re-immense myself in what was my own culture, the culture and forces that formed my life at a young age.

Teaching at a college, you have a certain body of information I think you should try to get across and you're busy doing that, but that can be restrictive. In many cases, there's a role as faculty member that has to be played. Paying attention because he's going to ask questions later sometimes becomes more the motive of the students, to pass rather than to learn.

I don't mean to imply that students are less sincere. But there's a contract when you enter a college course to complete certain things to the satisfaction of the teacher. I think that contractual thing should be as minimal as possible. I believe if one is really interested in learning, they will pass the course as a byproduct.

Q: Do you often become involved in community affairs outside this building? I'm referring to your participation in the protest about the Raymond Mosley case.

A: In the four years since we've been here, this is the first thing of that type I've been involved in.

In the first place, it was my own, personal expression. I had to act. If nobody else was out there I would have been. I'd already gotten responses from people in the community who were scared. Kids who used to come to my class were telling me that they couldn't come on Saturday because the Klan was coming through, and that frightened me, because that's what the effect of the Klan used to be and that's what it was for.

The Mosley thing bothered me most because whether the story of the way it happened was true or not we had to accept it the way you'd accept any report in the newspaper. There were eyewitnesses I knew who'd seen it or heard it and they haven't changed their stories.

The kid was killed. To let a thing like that happen and not respond, to me was shocking.

Q: What has the community response been to Communications Village?

A: There's still room for it to grow, but people deal with this place on their own levels.

The kids like me and they like being here. This place is treated with great respect. You have 11, 12, even 4-year-old kids hanging on the door to get into something that other organizations have to go out and recruit them for. Anytime you have a live response like that something you're doing is right.

Battles expected over executions, no-fault

ALBANY (UPI) — A head-on clash with the governor and heated charges over broken promises can be expected this week as the State Legislature takes up the sticky issues of the death penalty and no-fault auto insurance.

Although Gov. Hugh L. Carey has indicated he would veto any legislation authorizing a death penalty in New York, the Senate last week passed such a bill and the Assembly is viewed as likely to follow suit this week.

The issue lay dormant for several months until the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Louisiana's death penalty statute, similar to New York's, which prescribes death for any person convicted of killing a law or correction officer.

The bill aimed at eliminating the court's objections sets up a two-trial system in which a second jury would determine whether to impose the death penalty, after mitigating circumstances had been considered. The measure also expands capital punishment to include murder performed for hire, during a kidnapping or involving a witness.

Assembly sponsor, Vincent Graber, D-West Seneca, predicted the measure would pass by a comfortable margin in house, although debate is expected to be as emotionally urged as it was last week in the Senate.

If the measure is passed early in the week, it would per-

mit enough time for lawmakers to try to override the governor's expected veto. Graber has predicted the vote on an override would be "very close."

In another emotional issue, particularly for consumers, the state's no-fault auto insurance system is up for re-vamping in an attempt to further limit lawsuits arising from accidents and to put a lid on resultant medical costs.

Raceway worker held in sidewalk driving

MONTICELLO — A Monticello Raceway employee was jailed Sunday after being charged with second-degree reckless endangerment and three traffic violations after he allegedly drove his vehicle on a Broadway sidewalk in Monticello.

Scott J. Gretzinger, 21, of Milwaukee, Wis., was arrested at about 11:30 Saturday night in front of the Family drug-store at Broadway and Jefferson Street. Gretzinger, who is being held in the Sullivan County Jail in lieu of \$250 bail, allegedly drove his vehicle for some distance on the sidewalk, failed to comply with a policeman's directions to stop and had no insurance for the vehicle.

The attempted revisions could run into trouble in the Assembly, where 60 members have sponsored a bill to do away with no-fault altogether, arguing it has not reduced insurance premiums, as promised, but has raised them since no-fault was passed into law four years ago.

After months of haggling, leaders appear to have settled on a plan which replaces the requirement that an accident victim sustain more than \$500 in physical injuries before being permitted to file suit. Instead, the victim would have to prove "serious injury", such as loss of income over an extended period.

Both houses are to vote on that change next week — as well as one which limits medical fees doctors can charge accident victims, tying them to current reimbursement rates in the state's workmen's compensation program.

Senate minority leader Manfred Öhrenstein, D-Manhattan, last week seemed to sum up the feelings of many state lawmakers discouraged over the no-fault issue.

"The members want to do something to drive down the cost of rates. I can't do it and no one can. It's not easy to go back to your constituents and tell them perhaps we can hold down the rate of future increases. That's not much to hold out in them," he said.

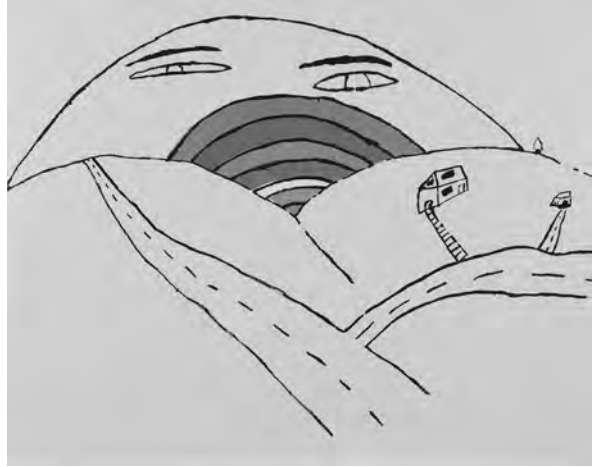
**“Q&A: Artist paints picture of involvement,” Times Herald Record
[Middletown, NY],
June 20, 1977**

Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.04.4.001, VA12.04.8.001, VA12.04.7.001, VA12.04.3.001

The poster in this case and enlarged on the wall in the center of this room provides the most concise presentation of Benjamin Wigfall’s concept for Communications Village. The paragraph in the top left corner outlines his ambitious vision “to establish a new and contemporary relationship between artists and community and to develop a new public for the arts while revitalizing the art world for the traditional arts public.” The description of available services appearing along the side of the poster describes the diversity of community programs.

Printed sometime between 1977 and 1978, the poster itself was a collaborative project. Diane Hunt, a former SUNY New Paltz student, was the graphic designer. An active teacher and participant at Communications Village, she laid out a photographic grid of visiting artists, consultants, and student participants that illustrated the breadth of the community.

Most of the photographs were taken by Rose Tripoli, a recent SUNY New Paltz graduate. In 1976, Communications Village had organized an exhibition of her Ponckhockie Houses photography series documenting the structures in the neighborhood around Communications Village. Her cutout image of the building at 241 Catherine Street on the poster's front became the iconic visual symbol of the entire community that came together inside its walls.



Olga Edwards

Untitled, ca. 1972–82

Etching on wove paper

Sonya Easter

Untitled, 1978

Screenprint on laid paper

Dawn Alyce Washington

Untitled, 1977

Woodcut on mulberry paper

Debbie Jo Washington

Untitled, 1978

Etching

Teresa Thomas

Girl by Van, 1976

Etching on wove paper

COMMUNITY

EXPLORATION - INFORMATION - EXPERIMENTATION

WORK SESSIONS

PRINTMAKING

MONDAY 7-10 p.m.

WEDNESDAY 7-10 p.m.

From January 16 to March 8, 1978

PHOTOGRAPHY

TUESDAY 3-6 p.m. (young people)

WEDNESDAY 7-10 p.m.

FRIDAY 3-6 p.m.

SAUNDERS 7-9 p.m. (young people)

From January 27 to March 11, 1978

DRAWING - SKETCHING

TUESDAY 7-10 p.m.

WEDNESDAY 3-6 p.m. (young people)

THURSDAY 7-10 p.m.

SAUNDERS 11 a.m.-1 p.m. (young people)

From January 17 to March 21, 1978

FOR REGISTRATION AND INFORMATION CONTACT:

COMMUNICATIONS VILLAGE LTD.

241 catherine st., kingston, n.y.

(914) 338-8623

This service is funded by CETA

and

the New York State Council on the Arts

10 per class

	M	T	W	TH	F	S
9-10						
10-11						
11-12						
12-1						
1-2						
2-3						
3-4						
4-5						
5-6						
6-7						
7-8						
8-9						
9-10						
10-11						
11-12						

Children's Photo

Children's drawing

adult Photo

adult drawing

Printmaking (P)

name/address/phone

Children's Drawing - Wednesdays 3-6

NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE
1. Max ^{229 West 1st}	338-5109	
2. William Drake	54 Sycamore	338-0896
3. Jerry Drake		338-0896
4. Kevin Drake		338-0896
5. Sonja Easter		338-5385
6. Phyllis Barnes	213 Catherine	331-8442
7. Olga Edwards	227 East 2nd	338-0896
8. Norman James	17-19 Maple Street	
9. Sarah Singleton		339-4581
10. Edward Singleton		339-4581
11. John ^{110 West 1st}		

Children's Drawing - Saturdays 11-1

NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE
1. William		338-0896
2. Jerry		338-0896
3. Kevin		338-0896
4. Sonja Easter		338-5385
5. Alfreda Drake	54 Sycamore St	338-0896
6. Phyllis Barnes	213 Catherine	331-8442
7. Phil Knox	Alfred Street	338-861
8. Norman James	17-19 Maple Street	
9. John Washington	65 Gill St.	
10. Deborah	45 Gill St	339-4769

Printmaking (A) - Mondays 7-10

NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE
1. James Gardner	265 PHOENICIA	688-2207
2. SA Dwyer	46 Franklin St.	338-3314
3. Daniel Stovall	2369 W Saugerties Rd Saug	246-2200
4. PETER BAUMANN	8 HILLCREST AVENUE, WOODSTOCK, NY 12498	679-2372
5. Robert Carter	34 Hill St Kingston, NY	691-3385/385
6. Hassan Knox		331-5036
7. Robert Castagna	338-7875	206 Baycrest AVE
8. Patricia Thomas	338-7875	Stard
9. Jim Brown	22 Amsterdam Ave	338-0601
10. Walter Washington	65 Gill St	338-5261
11. Bruce St. Clair	151 Kentham St.	339-3658
12. John Ford	27 Clearwater St. Holliston	691-2487
13. Terry O'Brien	20 Catherine Highlands	691-2545
14.		

**Communications Village's
Community Sessions flyer, 1978**

**Benjamin Wigfall's schedule and
class rosters, 1978**



Robert "Bobby" Easter

Untitled ("Love Is in My Heart")

Zinc plate

Communications Village student

Untitled (Helicopter and Car)

Zinc plate

Communications Village student

Untitled (Person and Two Tables)

Zinc plate

As the class announcement and schedule in this case show, Communications Village offered a variety of art workshops for all ages, including children. The prints on this wall were made at various printmaking workshops, and some of the students' names appear in the sign-in sheets here. The images on the plates illustrate the wide range of their skills and ages. The youth not only attended the classes, but they also printed the posters that advertised the workshops, which required learning to use the letterpress. The reversed letters in the “prnitmaking” workshop poster on the wall to the left remind viewers of the challenge presented by spelling (not to mention drawing) in reverse, at any age.

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.08.5.005, VA12.08.5.003, VA12.08.5.002, VA12.08.5.004, VA12.08.5.001, VA12.04.4.013, VA12.04.4.014, VA12.08.4.008, VA12.08.4.008, VA12.08.4.010, VA12.08.4.014

KING SOLOMON'S
GATEWAY MASONIC LODGE
sponsors
ANNUAL
SPRING DANCE
featuring
BLACK SUNRISE
SAT. JUNE 3, 1978
9^{pm} - 2^{am}
SOUL FOOD BUFFET SERVED 9-11^{pm}
KINGSTON INDIANS LODGE HALL
82 PRINCE ST. KINGSTON, N.Y.
\$10 PER PERSON **BYOB**

**CHILDREN'S
ARTWORKSHOP**
SATURDAYS 11^{A.M.}
COMMUNICATIONS VILLAGE LTD.
241 CATHERINE ST.

**PHOTOGRAPHY
WORKSHOP** 6 SESSIONS \$12
WEDS. 7 - 10^{P.M.}
COMMUNICATIONS VILLAGE LTD.
241 CATHERINE ST.

**FILM MAKING
WORKSHOP**
MON. & WEDS
6:30-9:30 12 SESSIONS
JULY 11 - AUG 17
COMMUNICATIONS VILLAGE LTD.
241 CATHERINE ST.

Communications Village

Annual Spring Dance Poster,

1978

Relief print on wove paper

Children's Art Workshop Poster,

ca. 1976–78

Relief print on wove paper

Film Making Workshop Poster,

ca. 1976–78

Relief print on wove paper

Photography Workshop Poster,

ca. 1976–78

Relief print on wove paper

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.04.7.008, VA12.04.7.003, VA12.04.7.002, VA12.04.7.004

PHOTOGRAPHS HARO KAGEMOTO **PHOTOGRAPHS**
MARCH 21
APRIL 2 1978
COMMUNICATIONS
VILLAGE LTD
241 CATHERINE ST
KINGSTON NY
made possible with the assistance of CETA and NYSCA

PRINTMAKING
WORKSHOP 6 SESSIONS \$12
THURS. 7 - -10 P.M.
COMMUNICATIONS VILLAGE LTD.
241 CATHERINE ST.

MEETING
TO ORGANIZE
COMMUNITY CHOIR
MRS. JENNETTE WASHINGTON DIRECTOR
MON. FEB. 31 6-30
COMMUNICATIONS VILLAGE LTD.
241 CATHERINE
338-8623

Communications Village

Haro Kagemoto Photographs Poster, 1978

Relief print on wove paper

Printmaking Workshop Poster, ca. 1976–78

Relief print on wove paper

Meeting to Organize Community Choir Poster, ca. 1976–78

Relief print on wove paper

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives,
VA12.04.7.007, VA12.04.7.005, VA12.04.7.006

GALLERY 4



VISITING ARTISTS AT COMMUNICATIONS VILLAGE

Wigfall invited a diverse network of artists to participate at Communications Village on varying levels. While the prints the artists made at Communications Village are on display in the next room, the works on display here represent the wide range of artist involvement at Communications Village, from giving talks about their work to serving on a board of advisors.

Some artists, such as Pat Jow, not only made work at Communications Village but helped to teach classes and run programs there over the years. Others, such as Ernest Frazier, appear to have only participated briefly.

There is no evidence that Mavis Pusey made a print at Communications Village, however, the impact of her visit resides in a recording of her powerful presentation there, a portion of which is accessible in this gallery.



Mavis Pusey

American, born Jamaica, 1928–2019

Decaying Construction, 1970

Screenprint on BFK Rives wove paper

Born in Jamaica, Mavis Pusey moved to New York City at age eighteen in the mid 1940s to study fashion design. She also studied painting and printmaking at the Art Students League. In the 1960s, she moved to London and then Paris before returning to New York City in 1969. She worked for three years with Robert Blackburn in his Printmaking Workshop, where she likely met Wigfall. She was also Assistant Professor of Fine Arts at SUNY Stony Brook.

When Mavis Pusey spoke at Communications Village in 1976, she presented a slide show that included *Decaying Construction*. Wigfall recorded her conversation with the community in which

she described the inspiration for her series on gentrification. As she explained abstract art to the students, she also emphasized that her own compositions were always based in the ordinary things around her.

Decaying Deconstruction can be read both as a dynamic abstract composition and an image of demolition and deconstruction. She went on to elaborate on the power of observation as the first step in making art and encouraged the youth to look around them.

Press the button to hear an excerpt of Mavis Pusey's visiting-artist talk at Communications Village.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund and National Endowment for the Arts Fund for American Art, 2022.59



Pat Jow Kagemoto

American, born 1952

Joe Ramos and student printing at Communications Village, ca. 1970s

Gelatin silver print

Everett Winrow at Communications Village, ca. 1976–78

Gelatin silver print

Everett Winrow, Gia Wigfall, and Mary Wigfall at Communications Village, ca.

1970s

Gelatin silver print

Benjamin Wigfall

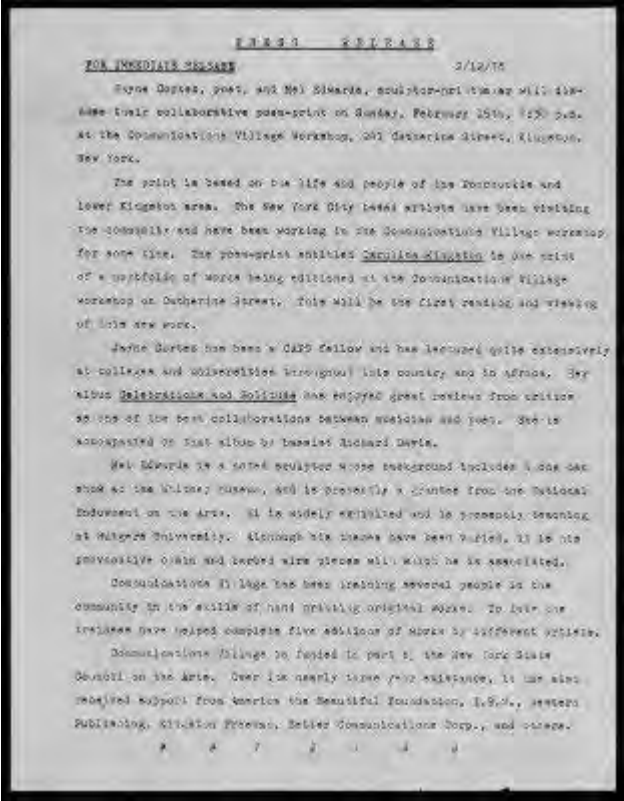
American, 1930–2017

Pat Jow at Communications Village, ca. 1976

Gelatin silver print

Jayne Cortez reading at Communications Village, February 15, 1976

Gelatin silver print




exhibition of drawings & studies from

**THE
NOTEBOOK
OF
ERNEST FRAZIER**

1969-1972

Talk to be given on Monday, December 13



December 10-16, 1976 Exhibition Hours: 11 am-6 pm.

COMMUNICATIONS VILLAGE LTD.
241 catherine st., kingston, n.y.



Press release for visit by Jayne Cortez and Mel Edwards to Communications Village, February 12, 1976

Communication Village's flyer for The Notebook of Ernest Frazier 1969–1972, December 10-16, 1976

Pat Jow Kagemoto

American, born 1952

Ernest Frazier presenting “The Notebook of Ernie Frazier” talk at Communications Village, December 13, 1976

Gelatin silver print

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.04.4.011, VA12.04.4.015, VA12.04.4.012, VA12.04.4.008, VA12.04.4.007, VA12.04.4.006, VA12.04.4.009, VA12.04.4.010

Cinque Gallery, Inc.

NEW YORK 10001

425, GARFINKLE STREET, N.Y. 10001

January 11, 1972

Mr. Donald Seft
Dean, School of Fine Arts
University of South Florida
Tampa, Florida 33620

Dear Mr. Seft:

We, Emma and Ernest Cricklow, are Directors of the Cinque Gallery here in New York City, which we operate to assist talented young minority artists.

During the past four or five years that we have known Mr. Mignello, we have included works of his in several exhibits. One such exhibit was "15 Under 40", in which we were privileged to serve as Co-Directors, took place during the summer of 1969 in Saratoga, New York. Mr. Mignello was chosen as one of the fifteen artists from around New York State, because we have a deep appreciation for his painting as well as his graphics.

Beyond his capabilities as an artist, we find Mr. Mignello to be a most dedicated person who gives completely of his talents to his students and to any endeavor in which he becomes involved. From our knowledge, also, of his character, we can unqualifiedly recommend Mr. Mignello for any possible academic assignment on your staff.

Very truly yours,

Emma Cricklow
Ernest Cricklow

Enclosure

IN CASE

Letter of recommendation for Benjamin Wigfall from Cinque Gallery,
January 11, 1972

Romare Bearden and Ernest Crichlow exhibited Wigfall's work at Cinque Gallery, which they founded with Norman Lewis in 1969. It was one of the first Black artist-run art galleries in New York City, and they named it after Joseph Cinqué, the leader of an 1839 slave ship revolt. Cinque provided Wigfall a pivotal entry point into the New York City art scene.

This letter from Bearden and Crichlow demonstrates the ways in which Cinque supported artists' careers beyond exhibitions through various professional programs, including referral services, slide development, artist residencies, emerging artist awards, and master class projects. A

few years later, when establishing Communications Village, Wigfall drew inspiration from Cinque and sought the counsel of its founders; both Bearden and Crichlow served as advisors to the community art center.

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.01.3.002



Ernest T. Crichlow

American, 1914–2005

Young Lady in Yellow Dress, 1982

Etching and aquatint on Arches wove paper

Ernest Crichlow embraced the realist tradition, often making beautiful portraits of Black subjects. He was a member of the generation that linked the art of the Harlem Renaissance with the younger African American artists working in the 1960s and '70s in New York. Born in Brooklyn, Crichlow studied under the artist and art educator Augusta Savage at the Harlem Community Art Center, where he met Norman Lewis and Romare Bearden in the late 1930s. Thirty years later, at the height of their careers in the 1960s, these three artists decided to address the prejudice African American artists still faced in the mainstream art world by starting a gallery that extended opportunities to younger artists. Crichlow's

support of Wigfall extended to
Communications Village, where he visited
and presented a talk.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Aldine S. Hartman Endow-
ment Fund and National Endowment for the Arts Fund
for American Art, 2022.⁶¹



Romare Bearden

American, 1911–1988

12 Trains—Nite Train, 1974

Photo etching with hand coloring

Bearden was born in North Carolina before his family moved to New York City and then Pittsburgh. He studied at the Harlem Community Art Center in the 1930s and went on to develop an Abstract Expressionist painting style in the 1940s and '50s. Beginning in the 1960s, however, Bearden used a collage technique to construct fractured forms out of cut-and-reassembled materials, resulting in abstracted, overlapping images that often portrayed ordinary scenes of African American life and culture. Bearden translated his collage practice into printmaking through frequent visits to Robert Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop, where he made this work.

Wigfall described Romare Bearden as the “point of the triangle” for his generation of younger Black artists. Bearden, likewise, admired Wigfall’s art and supported his efforts at Communications Village by hosting participants at his New York City studio. Wigfall also took Communications Village students to hear Bearden speak at nearby Vassar College and to an outdoor concert in Woodstock when Bearden made a painting while the famed musician Max Roach played the drums.

Courtesy Nanette Bearden Trust and DC Moore Gallery, NY
Plate 80



Joseph Ramos

American, born 1943

Puerto Rican Odyssey, 1998

Photo lithography

Joseph Ramos, a New York City native from the Lower East Side, was a printmaker and younger colleague of Wigfall's in the art department at SUNY New Paltz. Wigfall and Ramos had both studied with Gabor Peterdi at Yale University's School of Art, although years apart. Peterdi's mentorship and their shared experiences working simultaneously in the mediums of painting and printmaking cemented their long artistic friend-ship. In addition to helping train students as printmaking apprentices at Communications Village, Ramos used the studio to develop his engraving practice.



Ernest Frazier

American, 1942–2004

Abstract, 1983

Acrylic paint on canvas

Born in South Carolina, Ernest Frazier grew up in Harlem before relocating to a housing settlement in Greenburgh, New York. He enrolled at the School of Visual Arts but dropped out after one year for financial reasons and joined the US military.

Following a tour of duty in southeast Asia, he returned in 1963 to complete his studies.

In the early 1970s, the Whitney Museum of Art featured Frazier's works in four prominent exhibitions: *Contemporary Black Artists in America* (1971), *Contemporary American Paintings* (1972), the Whitney Biennial (1973), and *The Twentieth Century, 35 American Artists* (1974). Despite this early recognition, Frazier never secured formal

gallery representation. During this period, he left New York City for the Hudson Valley and frequented Communications Village, where he gave an artist talk and exhibited works. His style resonates with, and by all accounts predates, Jean Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring.

Courtesy Woodstock Artist Association & Museum, Gift of Elliot and Ruth Gruenberg



Melvin Edwards

American, born 1937

Untitled, ca. 1972–82

Etching on wove paper

Edwards grew up in Houston, Texas, attending segregated schools. Phillis Wheatley High School provided him the opportunity to take classes at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and in 1955 he moved to Los Angeles, where he later earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from the University of Southern California. Although he began primarily painting abstractions, in 1960 he learned to weld. This skill shifted his artistic practice toward sculpture as he began to join together everyday steel objects—tools, nuts and bolts, scrap metal, and chains.

During this period, Edwards was also engaged in the burgeoning civil rights

movement and searching for ways to express his political and social commitments through his abstract art. Chains and barbed wire became two of the foundational materials that constitute his formal and symbolic visual vocabulary. Chains are present in this print, while barbed wire is featured in his sculpture and prints in the next room.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.236



VISITING ARTISTS AT
COMMUNICATIONS VILLAGE

Betty Blayton

American, 1937–2016

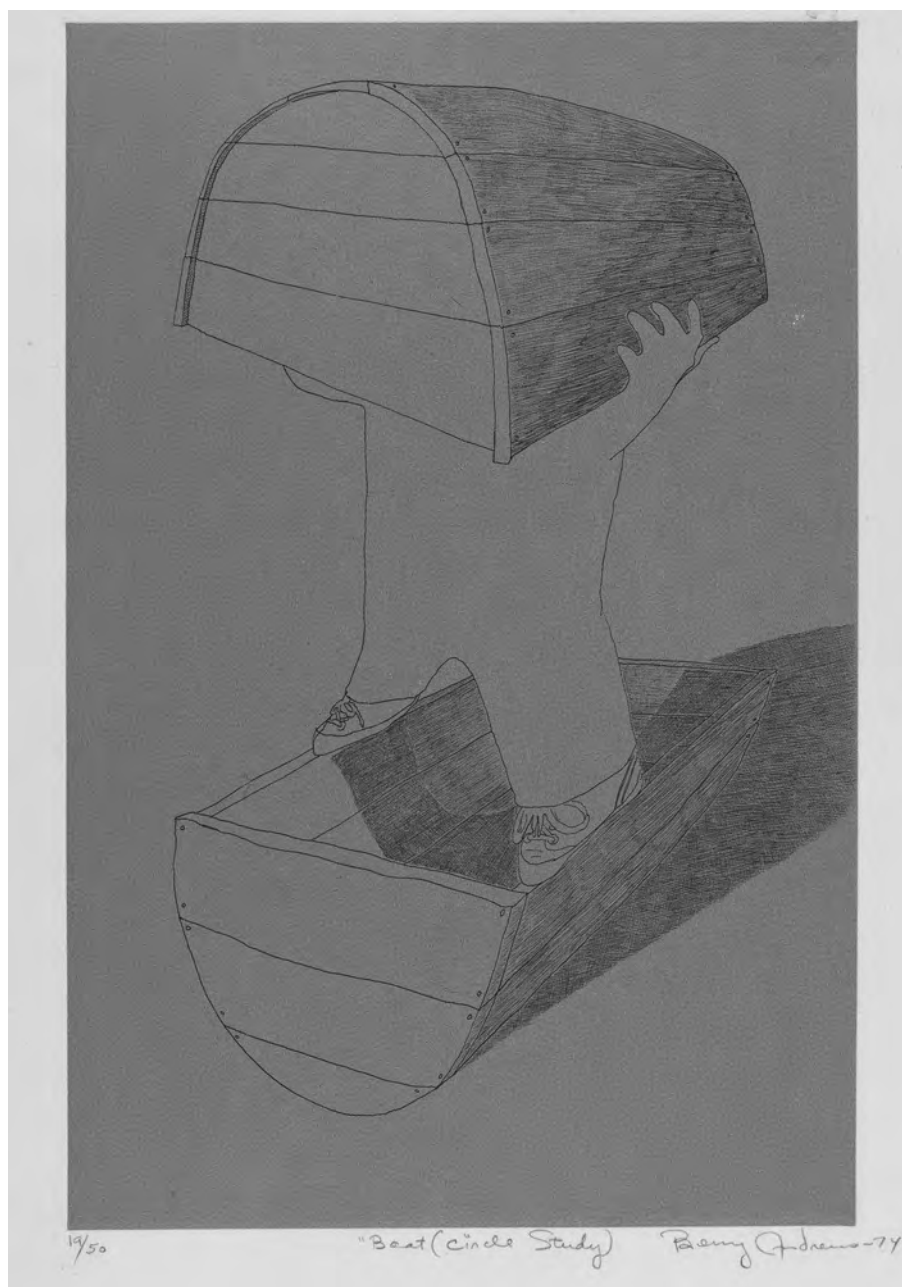
Improv #3, 1977

Monoprint

A native of Williamsburg, Virginia, Blayton went north to study art. As part of Virginia's prolonged fight against school integration, the state passed the Dovell Act, which provided African American students scholarships to attend out-of-state higher education programs rather than allowing them to attend equivalent colleges and universities in Virginia. Thus, the Commonwealth of Virginia helped pay for Blayton to attend Syracuse University, where she earned her degree in 1959. By the early 1960s, she settled in New York City and quickly became engaged in the art community in Harlem while developing her bright, abstract visual language as a painter and printmaker.

The discrimination Blayton experienced in the South inspired her, like Wigfall, to increase opportunities for artists and access to art education for youth. In 1968 she co-founded The Studio Museum in Harlem followed by The Children's Art Carnival in 1969.

Courtesy the Estate of Betty Blayton



Benny Andrews

American, 1930–2006

Boat (Circle Study), 1974

Etching on wove paper

When Benny Andrews visited Communications Village in May of 1976, he recorded an interview with Benjamin Wigfall. They discovered that they were born within days of one another and shared similar experiences growing up in the segregated South. Andrews attended schools in rural Georgia before moving north to earn his bachelor of fine arts degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Andrews usually featured human subjects prominently in his work, however, he often portrayed them in enigmatic, symbolic surroundings, such as this cartoon-like person obscured by a boat. In New York, he co-founded the Black

Emergency Cultural Coalition in 1969. Members included other artists whose work is represented in this room, such as Romare Bearden. The group mobilized in response to the exclusion of Black artists from the controversial exhibition *Harlem on My Mind* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and it continued throughout the 1970s to protest the marginalization of Black and other minority artists by New York City cultural institutions.

A transcript of Andrews and Wigfall's conversation is included in the exhibition catalogue.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.222



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Thunder Place, 1968

Etching and aquatint on wove paper

Everett L. Winrow

American, 1936–2007

The Sun in Leo, ca. 1972–82

Etching

Everett Winrow had been a student of Wigfall's at Hampton Institute. In the 1970s, his primary base remained Virginia, but he spent more than one summer living with the Wigfall family in New Paltz and participating fully in Communications Village. Few records of his artistic career still exist, but he appears frequently in photographs made at Communications Village, and the students remembered him as one of their mentors. Some of the students even thought he was related to the Wigfall family,

especially given his nickname, “Uncle Winrow.” In the print studio, he experimented with layering found textures, such as window screens, to make his abstract etchings. Wigfall’s influence as his teacher is clear in *The Sun in Leo*.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.207, 2022.238

GALLERY 5



INTAGLIO PRINT EDITIONS

Wigfall mounted the first exhibition of prints made by Communications Village's visiting artists in December of 1976. Although they all etched their own plates, the Communications Village students pulled the prints, each in an edition of fifty. These works are reunited on the surrounding walls.

In 1979, Communications Village produced a pamphlet, *Intaglio Prints Editions*, picturing the prints and images from the exhibition. Located in a case at the center of the gallery, it serves as a guide. Fully open, every print of the series appears on the verso.

Wigfall's center essay offers the longest explanation of his vision for the visiting-artist program. He especially focused on Communication Village's relationship to the surrounding neighborhood of Ponckhockie

in Kingston, where many of the families had migrated from Virginia and the Carolinas, as had he and his family.



Benny Andrews

American, 1930–2006

Girl, 1976

Etching on wove paper

Phyliss, 1976

Etching on wove paper

Model, 1976

Etching on wove paper

Teens, 1976

Etching on wove paper

Phyliss and the Church, 1976

Etching on wove paper

Dreamers, 1976

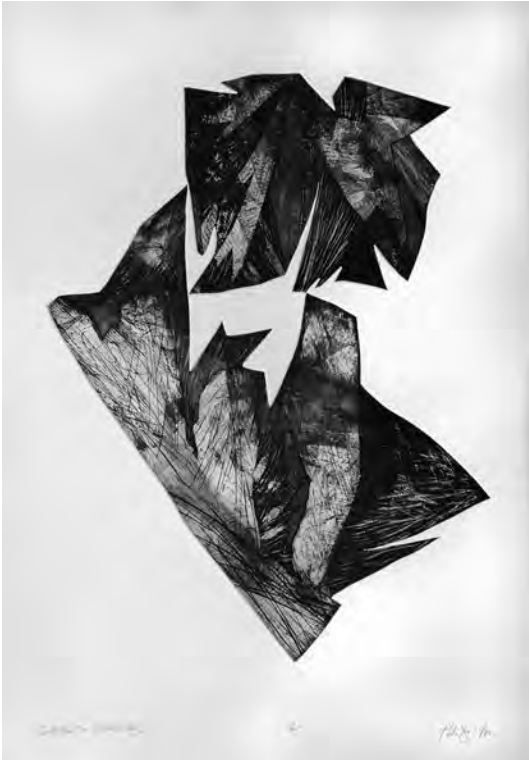
Etching on wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.229, 2022.230, 2022.231, 2022.233, 2022.232, 2022.228

Benny Andrews visited Communications Village for several days in May of 1976, producing a series of prints that depicted the art center's young participants. In *Dreamers*, four of the students lie next to one another along a riverbank under the clouds. Two of these students, Dina Washington and Teresa Thomas Washington, recalled that Andrews had actually drawn their likenesses as they were leaning forward on a table at Communications Village listening to Wigfall play his guitar. They were delighted by the transformation of the setting in the final composition. Andrews demonstrated for the students his ability to combine the power of observation with artistic imagination.

Phyllis and the Church shows a girl standing in front of Riverview Baptist Church, which was located across the street from Communications Village and provided a

frequent source for Wigfall's audio recordings of the community. Andrews's works resonated with the youth, many of whom still remember the importance of seeing themselves and their community represented in his art.



Pat Jow Kagemoto

American, born 1952

Untitled No. 93, 1975

Color viscosity intaglio and collograph on Arches buff paper

Untitled No. 101 (bird and star), 1975

Black intaglio on Murillo paper

Queens native Pat Jow (now Kagemoto) earned her bachelor of fine arts degree in printmaking at SUNY New Paltz, where she studied with Wigfall. She was especially fascinated with his abstraction of form and inclination to cut plates. She credits Wigfall with her own shift from realism to abstraction, noting how the visual language of abstraction within the context of printmaking allowed her “to express moods and atmosphere through texture.” Jow used Communications Village as her studio and produced many prints there, exploring her

preferred method of color viscosity.

Jow was also instrumental to Communications Village's daily operations: training youth as printing assistants, managing the darkroom and exhibition space, and photographing the organization's community activities. She provided the images that constitute the dynamic photomontage featured inside the *Intaglio Print Editions*.

Courtesy the artist



Betty Blayton

American, 1937–2016

Before We Were Chosen (titled Night Dancers in Intaglio Print Editions), 1978

Etching on Strathmore paper

Courtesy the Estate of Betty Blayton

Before We Were Chosen, 1978

Metal

Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.08.4.006



Mary Lou Morgan

American, active 20th century

Untitled, 1975

Etching on Arches wove paper

Diane Hunt

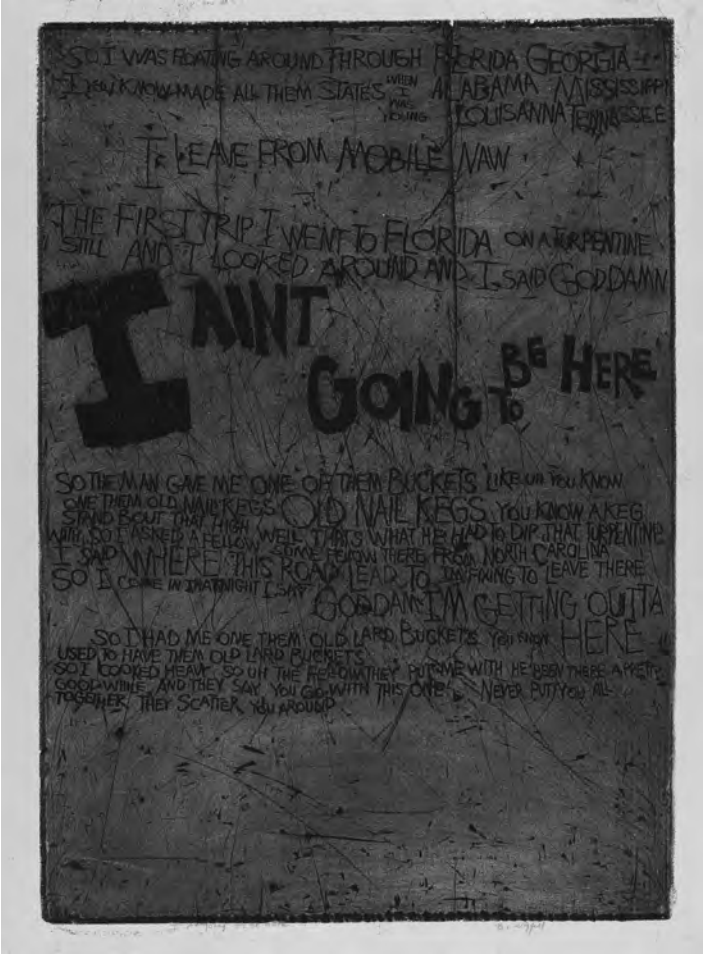
American, active 20th century

Untitled, ca. 1975–76

Intaglio on Arches wove paper

When they made these prints, Diane Hunt and Mary Lou Morgan were recent graduates of SUNY New Paltz's fine arts program, where they had studied printmaking with Benjamin Wigfall. They both also taught at Communications Village. Diane Hunt was credited as the graphic designer of the Communications Village poster enlarged on the central wall in the previous gallery and each woman is illustrated in the grid of participants.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.227, 2022.237



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

I Ain't Going To Be Here (titled *Mango—Turpentine* in *Intaglio Print Editions*),

ca. 1972–76

Etching on Arches wove paper

Mango—Life and Death, 1975

Etching on Arches wove paper

A part of his audio-graphic system prints, *Mango—Life and Death* references a recorded conversation Wigfall had with Mr. Kirk, an elderly man in the neighborhood who was known as Mango. As he had done with his series inspired by conversations with his father, Wigfall transcribed Mango's words and generated images and shapes based on what he heard in the recording. The cut plate shape in the composition also relates to the various permutations and

configurations of the *Nine Part Black Theme* series, and the embossed squares around the edge were a technique Wigfall learned when he studied at Yale with the artist Gabor Peterdi.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.187 , 2022.216



Joseph Ramos

American, born 1943

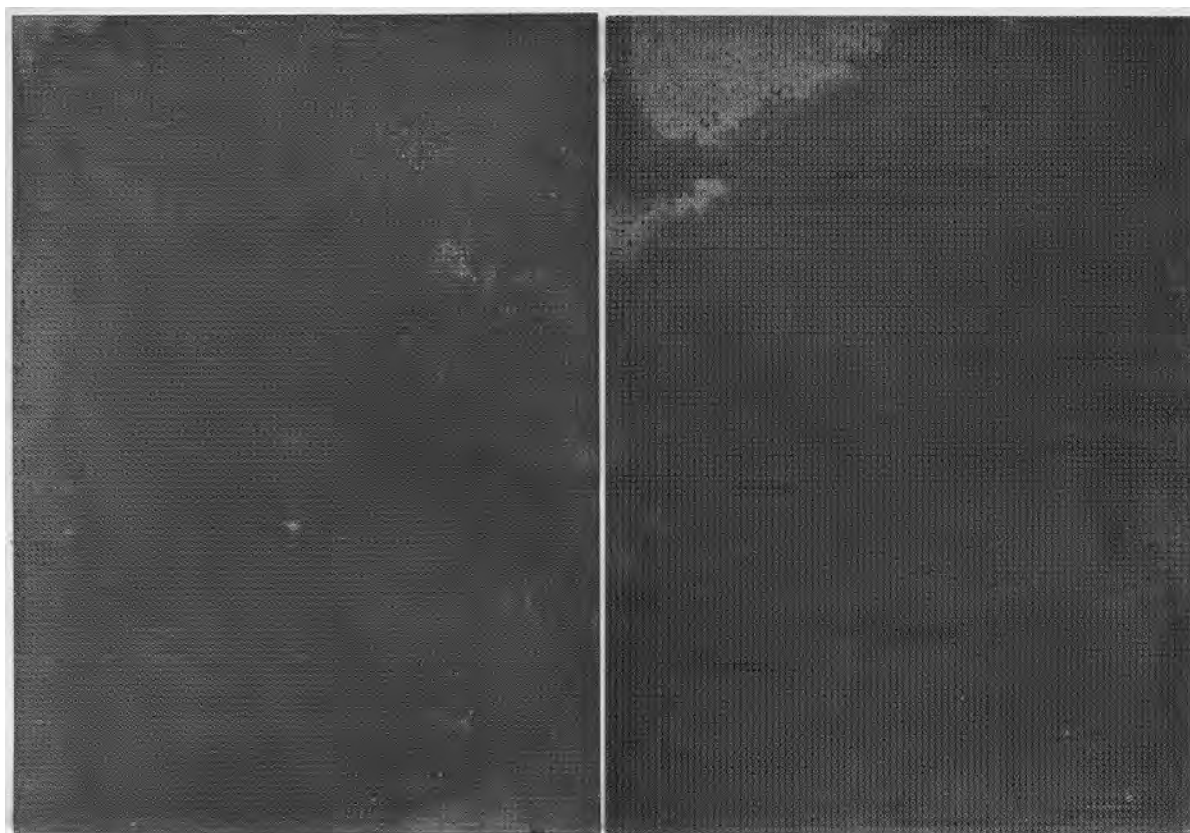
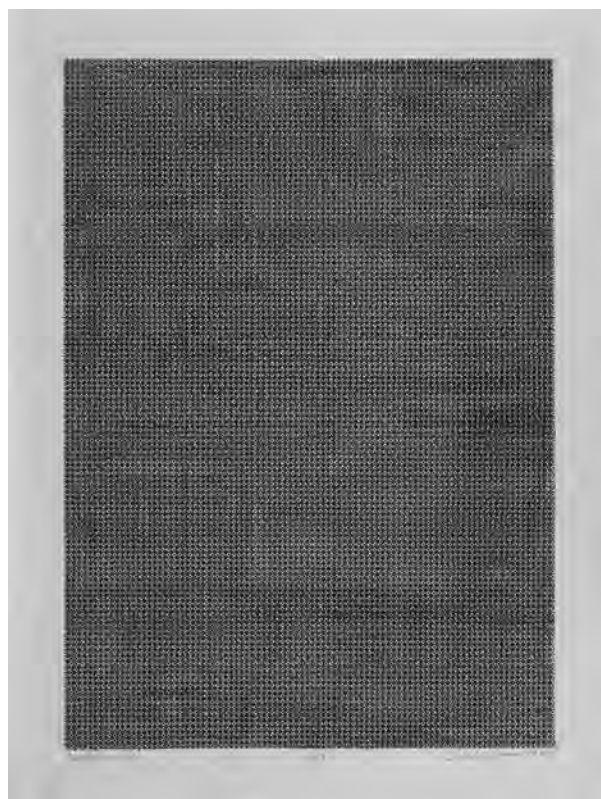
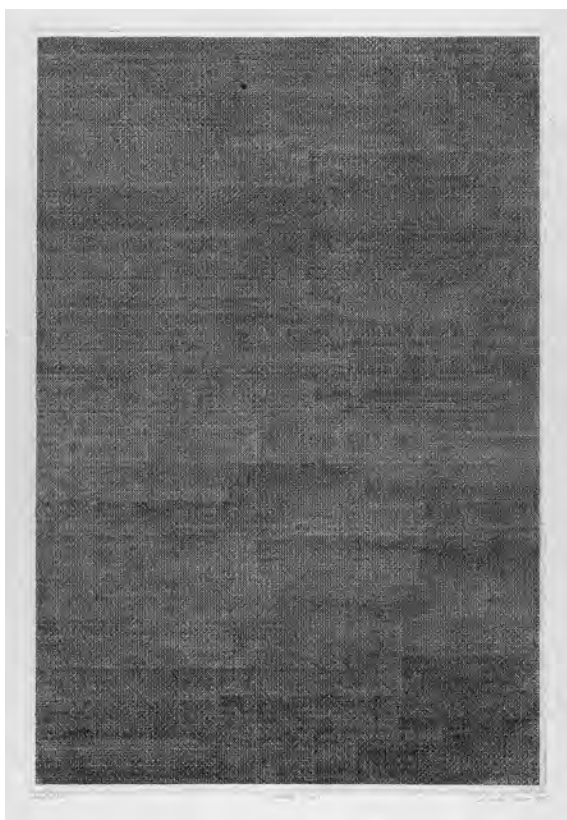
Converse All Stars, 1976

Etching and drypoint on wove paper

Ramos's print of Converse All Stars shoes was an iconic image for the Communications Village youth participants. Athletes, like the basketball great Julius Irving, wore Converse shoes, as did they. When Benjamin Wigfall invited Ramos to Communications Village, he had just begun teaching printmaking at SUNY New Paltz following his studies in intaglio and engraving with Gabor Peterdi at Yale University. Ramos never imagined he would produce such a popular work. His choice of subject was inspired by Pop Art images and a desire to scale up objects to the point of monumentality. He was interested in using engraving tools to represent objects of daily life, a tradition of printmaking that artists

such as Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg also practiced. A large image of Ramos pulling this print off the plate appears in the *Intaglio Print Editions* pamphlet in the case in this room.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.235



Charles Gaines

American, born 1944

Untitled, 1975

Etching on wove paper

Circles and X's, 1975

Etching on Arches wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.225, 2022.226

IN CASE

Circles and X's, 1975

Zinc plate

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.08.4.002

Charles Gaines was a young, conceptual artist living in New York when Bob Blackburn introduced him to Wigfall. He recalled the importance of Wigfall's printmaking workshop and visiting artist program at

Communications Village: “At the time minority artists were not fully members of the mainstream art community and the opportunity to produce print editions was scarce. Both he and Bob Blackburn provided this opportunity to a number of professional artists of color.”

Larry Carpenter was a teenage apprentice at Communications Village when he printed the edition of fifty of *Circles and X's* for the *Intaglio Print Editions* series. His proof of the work still hangs on the wall at his home. It reminds him not only of his own mastery of the incredibly demanding intaglio printing method but also of the exposure Ben consistently gave their community to challenging art.

Carolina Kingdon

We know you by your down
Carolina Kingdon
with your quiet force
and fleet like two-wheeler
arriving from Angola
in night-fleet
of a new migony
Advancing through Bita through falls
through miles through Pithouada
into sixty million of Lika-rader
and Proteusoma
the size of Ocean
like faucets of blood
no blood without faucets
the faucets without the tap
of Carolina Kingdon

Zarabai Mouth Woman
with your tongue of tobacco
and smell of your talismen border skin
against the wind of your perpendic yoke
surviving in mountains
on Riverfronts
and the matank valley
and the Comanche bar
and the splendor of Egyptian Coffins
into Johnnie Walker Red
with your dip
with your Struck
with you two women
and Beginning of the Julian faces
Advancing through cities through
countries through you
Carolina Kingdon
night-fleet from Angola
dancing on fish-blade

Johnnie Walker

Jayne Cortez

American, 1934–2012

Melvin Edwards

American, born 1937

Carolina Kingston I, 1976

Intaglio on wove paper

Sculptor Melvin Edwards and poet Jayne Cortez visited Communications Village several times before they presented their “poem-print” there in February of 1976. One of their first print collaborations, the work references the histories of migration that shaped the Ponckhockie neighborhood in Kingston, New York, where Communications Village was located. Many of the surrounding families had moved to Kingston from the Carolinas and Virginia to work at the brickyard. In the poem, Cortez mentions the Central African nation of Angola, extending the ancestry of the Kingston community back before the

transatlantic slave trade brought populations to the Carolinas. The text and barbed wire flow in similar directions and together illuminate a shared history intended to bind and empower the local community.

Their collaboration was undoubtedly among the works Wigfall was thinking of when he wrote, “It’s important to consider that these prints are by outstanding artists, some with international reputations. . . . When we consider that they came about because of, out of and by a little unknown community like this one in Kingston, New York, their uniqueness comes into focus.”

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.234



Melvin Edwards

American, born 1937

Untitled, 1975

Etching on wove paper

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.224

IN CASE

Untitled, 1975

Zinc plate

Untitled, 1975

Zinc plate

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives, VA12.08.4.004, VA12.08.4.005

GALLERY 6

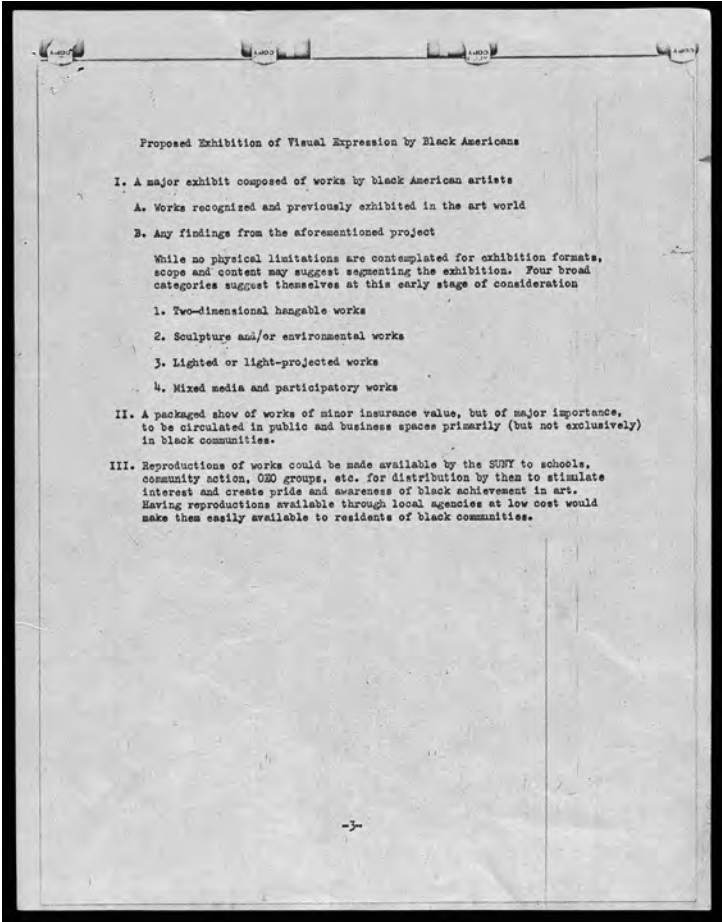
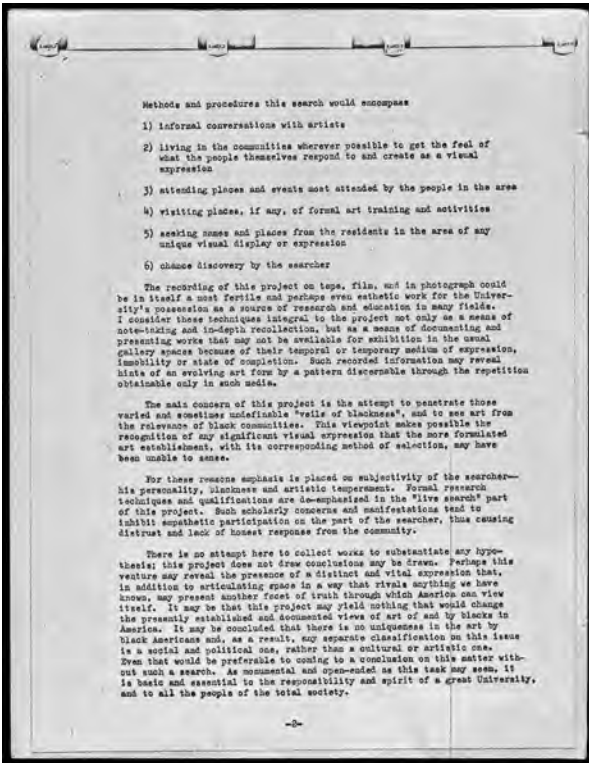
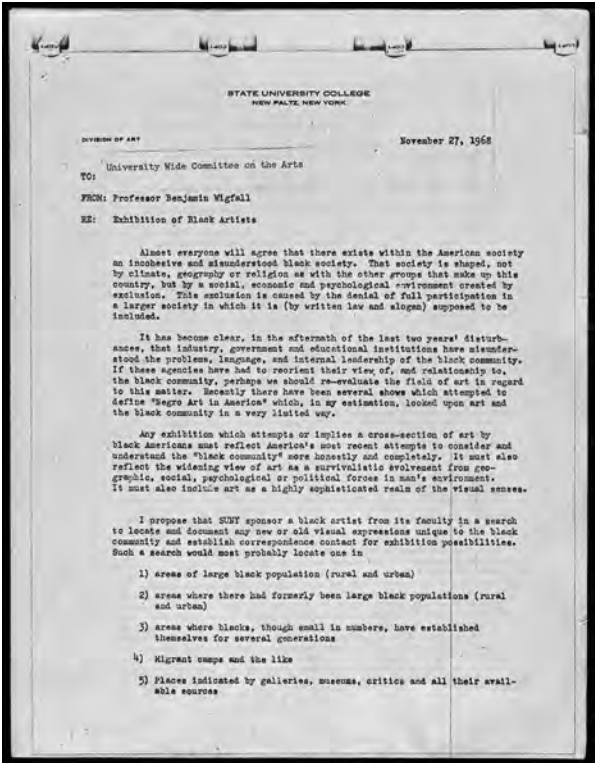


BENJAMIN WIGFALL'S VISION FOR AN EXHIBITION OF OUTSTANDING BLACK ARTISTS

In November of 1968, five years before Wigfall founded Communications Village, he submitted a proposal to the State University of New York University Wide Committee on the Arts. Titled “Exhibition of Black artists,” the document responded, as Wigfall explained, to the recent exhibitions of African American art that “looked upon art and the black community in a very limited way.”

This final gallery of the exhibition uses his criteria to realize the concluding portion of his proposal to SUNY: “A major exhibit composed by black artists,” consisting of “works recognized and previously exhibited in the art world.” Installed here are works by some of the most well-known artists of

Wigfall's generation whom he invited to Communications Village, illustrating the extraordinary network that Wigfall brought together.



Benjamin Wigfall's proposal for "Exhibition of Black Artists" to SUNY New Paltz University Wide Committee on the Arts, November 27, 1968

In Wigfall's proposal for an exhibition of Black artists at SUNY, he asked the University Wide Committee on the Arts to sponsor "a black artist from its faculty" to "document any new or old visual expression unique to the black community." His vision, as written, was ambitious, complex, and open-ended. He did not aim to "substantiate any hypothesis" but rather hoped to "present another facet of truth through which America can view itself." While he conceded that the project might "yield nothing" to change current perspectives, he argued "even that would be preferable to coming to a conclusion on this matter without such a search."

The outline for the project hewed closely to what Wigfall would go on to accomplish on his own over the next decade, without SUNY's support, through his audio-graphic practice, the establishment of Communications Village, and the exhibition and publication of the *Intaglio Print Editions*. His search most decidedly offered many more facets through which his own community, and others, can see America.

Benjamin L. Wigfall Artist Archives (VA-12), Gift of Michael Gino Wigfall and Gia Oke-Bello, Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library, VMFA Archives,
VA12.01.3.001



Melvin Edwards

American, born 1937

Corner for Ana, 1970

Barbed wire

Corner for Ana was first shown in the exhibition *Melvin Edwards: Works* at the Whitney Museum of American art in 1970. It was the first solo exhibition of an African American sculptor at the museum, a fact that reflected both the pervasive exclusion of Black artists from white institutions for most of the 20th century as well as Edwards's status as a groundbreaking artist. He melded the then-predominant visual language of a spare Minimalist style with materials—such as barbed wire—that evoke the history of race, labor, and violence in America.

An example of Edwards's "drawing in space," the work is composed of parallel horizontal

lines of barbed wire stretched from floor-to-ceiling across the corner of a room. The sculpture was part of a series of works, each named for close friends and family. He titled this work for his daughter, Ana.

His use of barbed wire to form lines in the plate and print Edwards made for the *Intaglio Print Editions* demonstrate the consistently avant-garde work produced at Communications Village for the surrounding community to see.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2018.402



Betty Blayton

American, 1937–2016

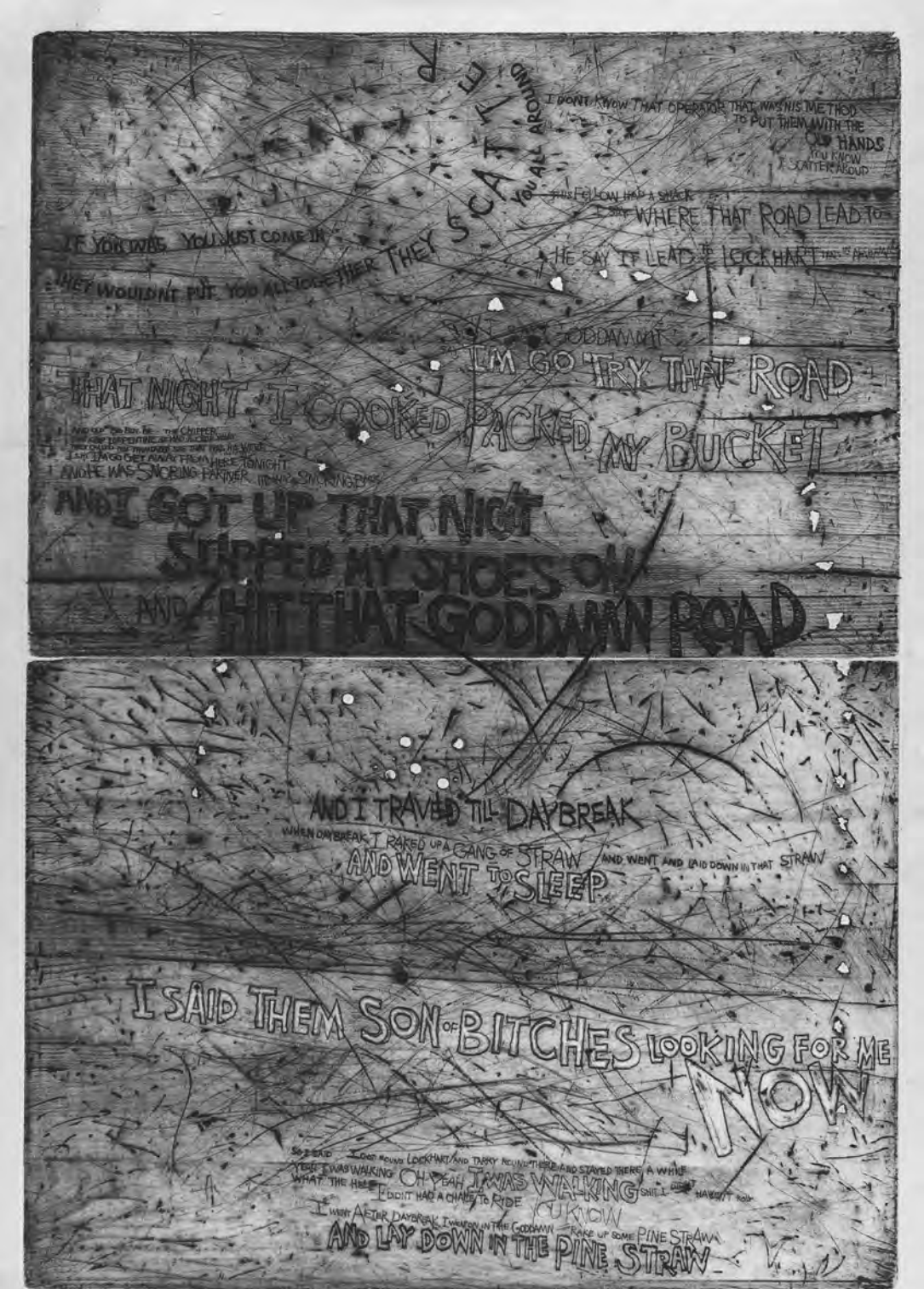
Consume #2, 1969

Oil and paper on cotton duck canvas

Consume #2 features many of the iconic aspects of Betty Blayton's body of tondo or circular paintings. The thin washes of paint and tissue paper she collaged to the surface produce an undulating and ethereal sense of depth. Blayton often used circles to represent wholeness.

The artist cut a circular metal plate to etch the print, *Before We Were Chosen*, which she made for the *Intaglio Print Editions*, on view on the wall to the left. Both her painting and print utilize the same shade of cobalt purple, illustrating the ways in which Communications Village offered a space to expand artistic themes and experiments across different mediums.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2018.352



BENJAMIN WIGFALL'S VISION FOR AN EXHIBITION
OF OUTSTANDING BLACK ARTISTS

Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Mango—Travels, 1987

Etching on wove paper

Mango—Travels is related to the earlier audio-graphic prints Wigfall made for the *Intaglio Print Editions* about Mr. Kirk, a Ponckhockie neighbor whose nickname was Mango. One of the young printmaking apprentices, Larry Carpenter, recalled that Wigfall's practice of taping conversations included playing them later for the benefit of the whole community: "Ben would visit the elder statesmen, the older folks in the community, and he would take his tape recorder . . . and they would tell him stories and he would tape them and take their pictures, and then he would have slideshows in the evening and invite the community to come and see themselves." He went on to explain the impact these

intergenerational programs had on him: “He taught me the value of what people have to offer as far as history, stories. He really wanted the community to be part of what he was doing.”

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.217



Benjamin Wigfall

American, 1930–2017

Burning #3, ca. 1957–63

Woodburning and paint on prefabricated wood doors

I have found wood burning allows me to use my conceptions as a painter and printmaker in one medium. —Benjamin Wigfall

In the late 1950s, as he explored the mediums of assemblage and printmaking, Wigfall started to work at a larger scale and adopted an engraving technique: he made multi-directional markings on wood with a burning razor. The scorched lines functioned like paint, marking the surface and cutting into the blue and white sections. He particularly appreciated his burning technique's "possibilities for expression" and he extended it into his printmaking and audio-graphic practices.

Wigfall exhibited *Burning #3* in a 1969 group show in New York City alongside other prominent artists including Benny Andrews and Faith Ringgold. In 1970, Cinque Gallery founders Romare Bearden and Ernest Crichlow also included it in their exhibition, *Fifteen Under Forty: Paintings by Young New York Black Artists*. Over the course of his career, it remained one of his most beloved pieces.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.203



Benny Andrews

American, 1930–2006

Bulls (Sexism Study), 1974

Etching and aquatint on Arches wove paper

From 1970 to 1975, Andrews worked on his multipart *Bicentennial series*, produced for the country's 200th anniversary. The aim of these large-scale paintings was to challenge the dominant historical narrative that marginalized Black Americans and other underrepresented groups. The print *Bull (Sexism Study)* and the painting *Sexism Study #24* (on the adjacent wall) are drafts of the main elements that appeared in his monumentally scaled 1974 painting *Sexism*.

Andrews's inclination to represent human oppression and injustice derived from his own advocacy work. His friend, the civil rights activist and congressman John Lewis, wrote, "For Benny there was no line where



BENJAMIN WIGFALL'S VISION FOR AN EXHIBITION
OF OUTSTANDING BLACK ARTISTS

his activism ended, and his art began. To him, using his brush and his pen to capture the essence and spirit of his time was as much an act of protest as sitting-in or sitting-down was for me.”

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2022.223

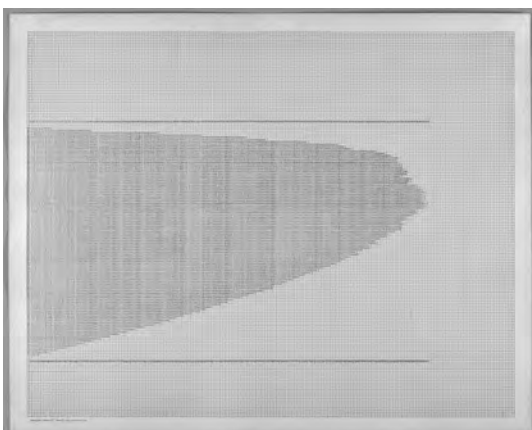
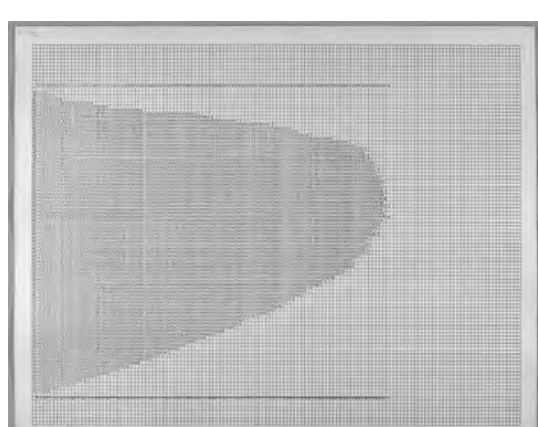
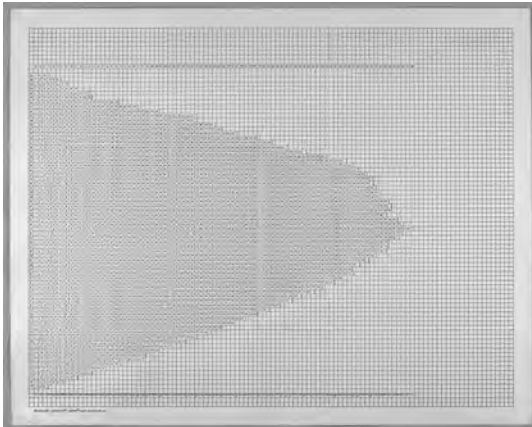
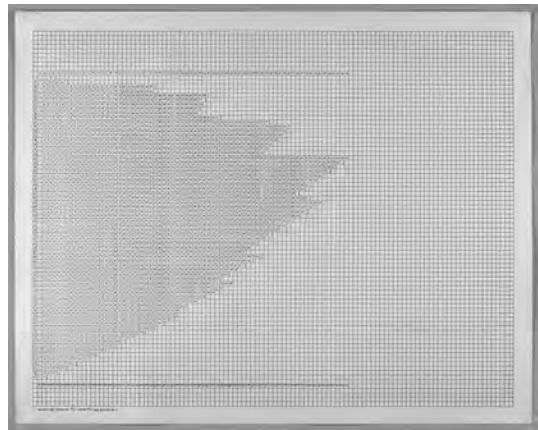
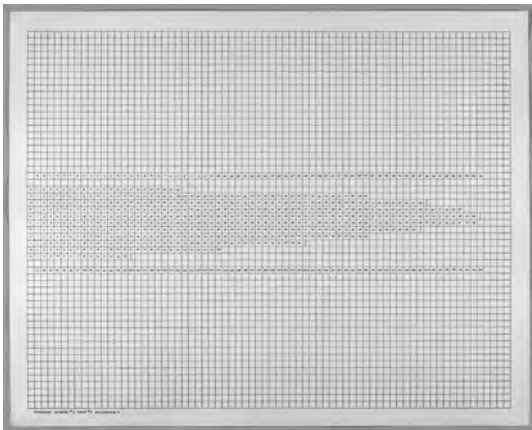
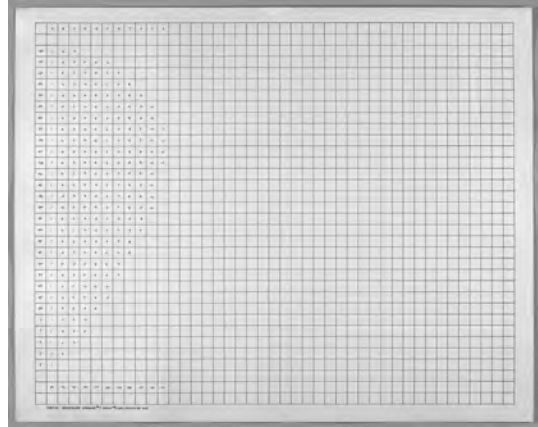
Benny Andrews

American, 1930–2006

Sexism Study #24, 1973

Oil on canvas with painted fabric collage and rope

Courtesy Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY



Charles Gaines

American, born 1944

Regression: Group #3, 1973–74

Black ink drawing on Strathmore wove paper

After earning an MFA from Rochester Institute of Art in 1967, Charles Gaines joined a new generation of artists making systematic, rule-based works under the rubric of conceptualism. His *Regression* series solidified his practice as a conceptual artist and served as a foundation for future works. In an interpretive guide to the series, Gaines explained his methodology and system for the drawings, in which the formula for each group of works is reliant on the group that preceded it.

By the mid 1970s, Gaines was represented by a major New York gallery and he had

work featured in the 1975 Whitney Biennial, an exceptional achievement for an artist so early in his career. Despite his success, he later expressed disappointment that his conceptual work was rarely shown at Black cultural organizations such as The Studio Museum in Harlem. Communications Village provided a rare exception. The diverse practices of the artists Wigfall invited to his space illustrates his expansive approach to art.

Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2022.2.1–7



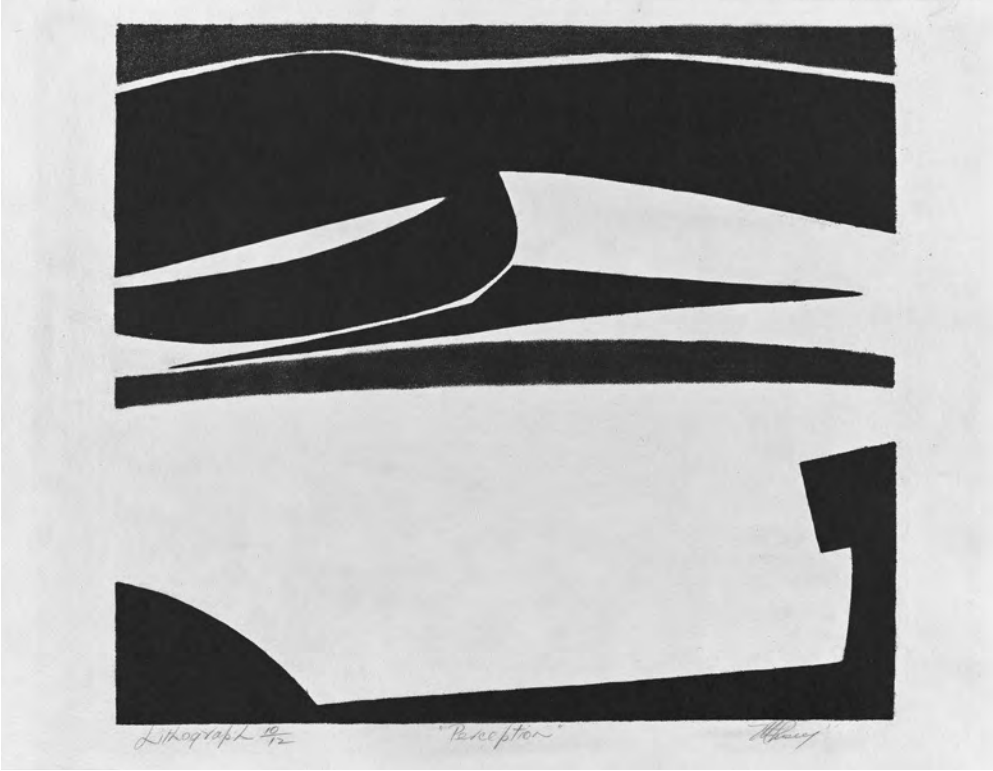
Mavis Pusey

American, born Jamaica, 1928–2019

Unave, 1968

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the Neil Lane Collection



Mavis Pusey

American, born Jamaica, 1928–2019

Perception, 1963

Lithograph on wove paper

Study, ca. 1970

Lithograph on wove paper

Mavis Pusey's painting *Unave* (on the opposite wall) and prints *Perception* and *Study* represent her purely formal geometric abstract style of the 1960s. By the early 1970s, she had begun to use abstraction in works such as *Decaying Construction*, featured in the previous room, as a means to address the perpetual cycle of gentrification in the city surrounding her. Pusey moved from New York to Orange, Virginia, in 1988, where she remained an artist and teacher until her death in 2019.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund and National Endowment for the Arts Fund for American Art, 2022.57, 2022.58

